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THE VOICE OF  
THE STREET

Ernest Poole

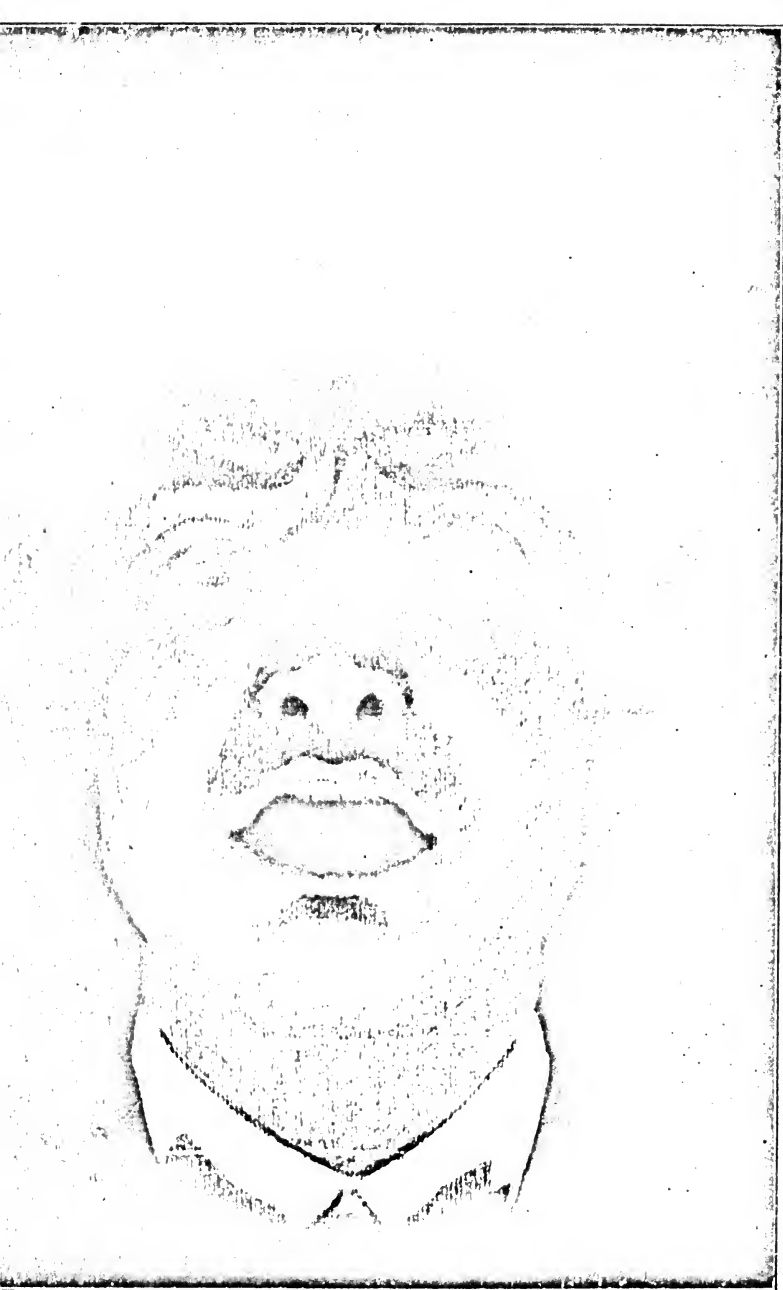
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The Voice of the Street.

# THE VOICE OF THE STREET

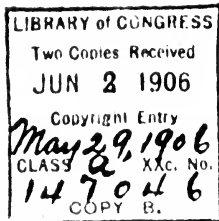
by  
ERNEST POOLE



NEW YORK  
A. S. BARNES & COMPANY

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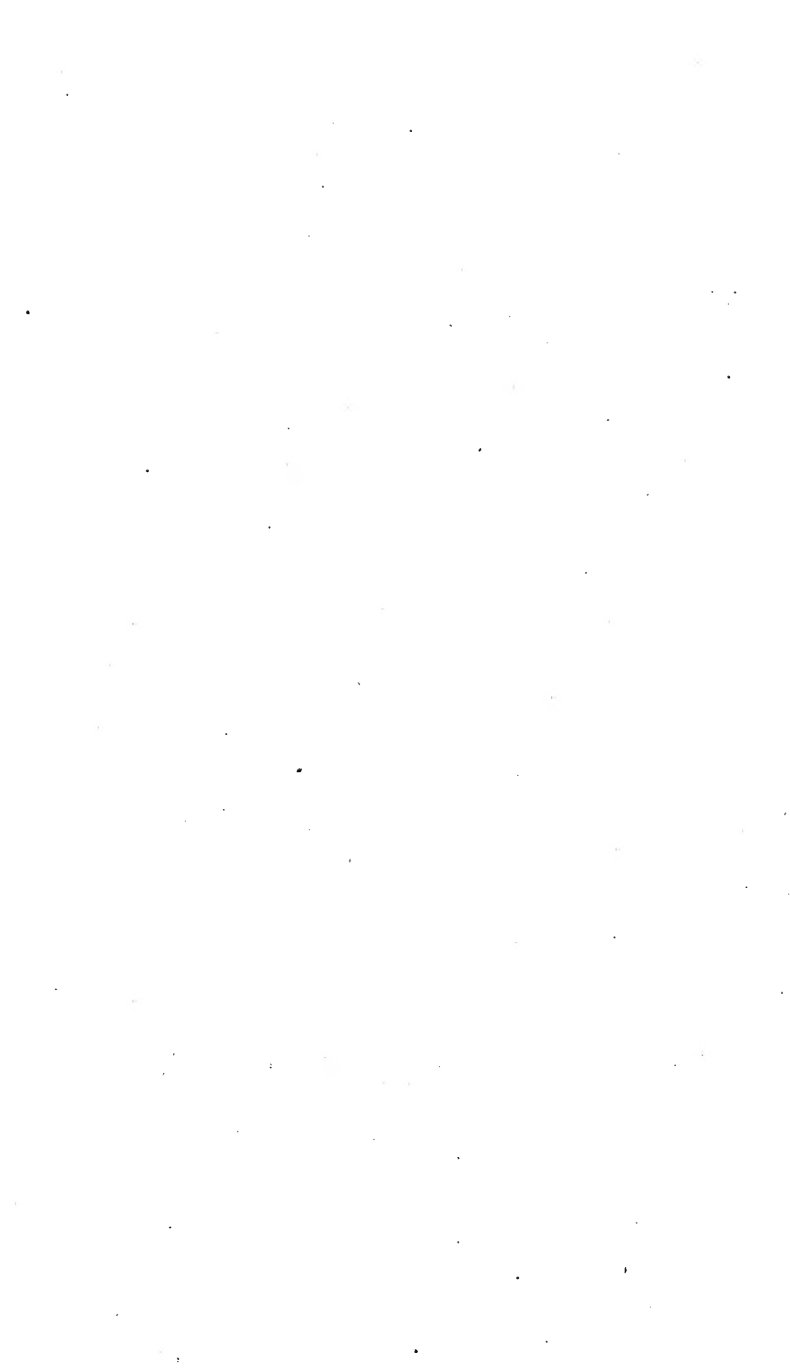
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*TO MY MOTHER*



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## *THE ILLUSTRATIONS*

The voice of the street! The street dazzling, roaring, clashing, straining—so it seems to the two million Italians who in the last few years have poured into the great American cities.

Joseph Stella was one. Like the other two million, he came from a country picturesque and simple and sunny—hills covered with vineyards, dotted with villas, old churches and little hamlets—places where Music and Art rise eternal in the souls of men.

The two million who come to America are promptly nicknamed “Dagoes,” and are put to work in ditches and sewers and tunnels and tenement sweatshops. Not long ago a factory inspector found a young Italian mother in her tenement room in New York—late at night, still sewing on coats and pants for the sweatshop. Her two wee children worked beside her. The only English words she knew were “Boss” and “Rent.” She had been thirty-six hours in America!

So it is with most of the two million.

But Stella had means. And when he came to New York some years ago, instead of going into

a ditch he went into a studio. There he worked hard. And when he wasn't at his easel he was wandering about the New York streets by day and by night.

Along the docks, where 40,000 men work in gangs of 400 to a ship. Often he saw 400 work thirty hours at a stretch—without sleep. For the ship must sail on time.

In the sweatshops and factories he saw the same race—men, women and children straining to keep up with the Machine!

In the cafés he saw the same race—Hungarian and Italian singers straining their voices to get encores from the gay, hilarious crowds of fun-seekers. He heard the old Italian songs dropped and replaced by the glorious throb of Ragtime.

Everywhere the Race for something.

A few months ago Stella met a young American who had been watching the same race and had put it into a novel—the story of a café singer. "The Voice of the Street."

The street was racing and straining; it seemed to suck in all the crowds and sweep them on; with eyes fixed they hurried and raced as they had raced the mad day long. The street was fascinating. Lights gleamed from a thousand windows, from towers, from twentieth stories, from sparkling signs hung high in blue and red incandescents, from pawnshops, lunchrooms, cafés and saloons, from trolleys and street stands, from trains high

up in the air and from holes that led into the subway. The roar was glorious! Nothing tired or sad or sentimental here; it was gay, throbbing, jerking, laughing, vibrating and thrilling with life. Life strung high! And soaring far above a thousand boy voices sang, "Extry! Extry! Extry!" All about graft, train smash-ups and strikes; about weddings, divorces and murders; football, prize-fights and horseraces. "Extry! Extry! Extry!" And, as fitting music to it all, a big street piano jerked out the quick, nervous throbbing of rag-time. The street laughed and sparkled and swore, the street roared! The street poured into the ears of ragged twelve-year-old Jim.

And the street came flashing out again from his black, dilated eyes. Only from his eyes. Under the gray slouch hat, pushed far back, his dark broad face was set and grim, his strong little body was huddled and rigid in loose brown rags, as he kneeled on one knee on the pavement, staring into the ring. Lucky Jim saw only the dice.

The Italian, reading, listening, watching—now expressed it all in these pictures. Pictures of feelings. They are unlike anything in Italian or American art. Why? Because they are neither Italian nor American. They are both. In them you can see the Italian becoming an American, struggling to express his feelings as he watches this new wild race of American life.

Stella is one of two million. Other millions are



coming to America. These millions are now slowly rising, just as the German and Irish immigrants slowly rose before them. As some of them leave the ditches and sweatshops for music schools and art studios—may we not expect some wonderful gifts to our American life—its pictures and its music? Is not this artistic feeling the very thing we lack—and should we not give to these Italians a warm and hearty welcome?

## CHAPTER I

### THE STREET MOULDING ITS CHILDREN

**L**UCKY JIM saw only the dice.

The street roared into his ears. Elevated trains thundered above him, the subway rumbled far below, trolleys clanged, wagons clattered, drivers swore and lashed. The street was at its height: It was six o'clock, the rush hour on a sparkling autumn night in the rush center of New York. Crowds were pouring by as far as you could see. Far behind, across City Hall Park, a black human tide swept under the blue frosty lights of Broadway, crowds of all sizes came hurrying over the park; on the left, crowds poured in from the Ghetto sweatshops; on the right, out of streets deep as canyons, more crowds were endlessly rushing. Directly before him they surged together, scrambled up elevated stairs and poured down holes into the subway, clung to the platforms of trolleys and elbowed and shoved on the pavements; while the main stream rolled straight up the great broad flights of iron stairs, up into the Bridge that tow-

ered and swept in one big arch to Brooklyn. The street was racing and straining; it seemed to suck in all the crowds and sweep them on; with eyes fixed they hurried and raced as they had raced the mad day long. The street was fascinating. Lights gleamed from a thousand windows, from towers, from twentieth stories, from sparkling signs hung high in blue and red incandescents, from pawnshops, lunch-rooms, cafes and saloons, from trolleys and street stands, from trains high up in the air and from holes that led into the subway. The roar was glorious! Nothing tired or sad or sentimental here; it was gay, throbbing, jerking, laughing, vibrating and thrilling with life. Life strung high! And soaring far above a thousand boy voices sang, "Extry! Extry! Extry!" All about graft, train smash-ups and strikes; about weddings, divorces and murders; football, prize-fights and horse races. "Extry! Extry! Extry!" And as fitting music to it all, a big street piano jerked out the quick nervous throbbing of rag-time. The street laughed and sparkled and swore, the street roared! The street poured into the ears of ragged twelve-year-old Jim.

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the gray slouch hat, pushed far back, his dark broad face was set and grim, his strong little body was huddled rigid in loose brown rags, as he kneeled on one knee on the pavement, staring into the ring. Lucky Jim saw only the dice.

He felt warm and glad inside, all other sounds seemed far away, only deep inside of him rose like a whisper:

"Seven or eleven! Seven or eleven!" He threw, and glared at the dice.

"Seven!" He had won, and he swept in the pool, and breathed, and threw a quick glance round the ring. A ring of loose excited faces, smoking and chewing nervously, laughing, joking, swearing at the dice; he saw their eyes change as they threw and lost; he saw them jump up one by one and rush off to black boots or sell papers—the old slow stupid way to make money, working till their arms and legs ached. No aching here, just quiet watching, feeling the luck inside grow bigger and bigger till he wanted to yell, but he just held his breath and shivered and kept quiet.

"Seven or eleven!" Again his turn was coming.

But who was this new one? Jim had never seen him before. An Italian bootblack, about fifteen. He had big round shoulders, a shaggy head, a fat

coarse face—deep lined, and heavy eyes set 'way in—dull but burning. He squatted down eating a thick cheese sandwich in big slow bites and swallows. He threw and lost and simply went on eating. He emptied all his cash before him; Jim counted with hungry eyes—eighty-three cents. Jim's own pile was a dollar ninety-two, and the thing inside him felt ready to burst. The others—beaten, penniless and hungry, dropped out one by one—till the only one left was the bootblack.

He looked up and asked Jim to double.

Four cents in the pool. Jim threw and won, and carelessly swept it in.

The bootblack swallowed the last big bite of his sandwich and asked Jim to double.

"The fool!" Eight cents in the pool. The Italian threw and lost. Jim threw—and lost; the other threw and lost. Jim threw—and won!

The bootblack asked him to double. Sixteen cents. Jim threw impatiently—and won! The bootblack asked him to double. Thirty-two cents!

The Italian threw and won! And then with a furious sweep of his thick ragged arm he gathered in the pool, and his big greenish eyes sneered into Jim's—strong, hard, hot; and he asked Jim to double.

"Aw, I'm not afraid!" cried Jim. He felt the crowd bending eagerly over, he heard the roar of the street 'way off, he glared and swore at the bootblack.

The bootblack threw and won!

Jim leaped up and asked him to double. A dollar twenty-eight! The Italian bent closer.

Jim's fists clinched, he grew cold as ice, he grabbed the box and shook it as though his life were in it, the luck inside him leaped up big and swelling, he grew hot and quivered all over and threw—and won! And swept in all the money and sneered at the bootblack.

The whole crowd jeered as the bootblack slowly rose. His face was stolid. Only—on his low, wide forehead, a few bright beads of sweat stood out. Jim watched him critically. And then a lump swelled up in Jim's throat. For the Italian grinned, tipped back his hat, put his hands in his pockets and sauntered away. But he left his box of brushes. Jim snatched them up and followed, watching the bootblack's head bend down, bumping blindly into people. And in little Jim's throat the lump got bigger and bigger.

"Gee! But the Dago had nerve!" he was thinking.

## CHAPTER II

### THE SONG BEGINS

**O**NLY an hour later. But already into Jim's life there had come a deep, mysterious change.

The street seemed down in another world. His old gray hat lay on his knees, he had one hand on the shoulder of the bootblack, and he leaned 'way forward, staring down a steep crowded theatre gallery.

Far below in the darkness was a soft light place of stars and trees and bushes and flowers; on one side was a gray-stone balcony covered with roses, a beautiful lady leaned out, and below stood a man in a queer bright dress, who was looking up and singing.

Jim had never dreamed of a song like this. He thrilled all up and down his spine, his legs and arms tingled, and a delicious numbness stole over his mind; he could only stare and feel; he remembered nothing.

How he had taken the bootblack off to a fine,

warm supper; how the little Italian had told of the wonderful music in this big show where his uncle sang in the chorus—all this was a dream; the whole world was a dream, and only the song was real.

No one else in the world had ever sung like this! The voice simply *poured* up, smooth and deep and rich as an organ; so unlike all the voices in shows on the Bowery; it came not just from the throat, but from 'way down in the man, and sometimes it made all the air just shake with feeling.

The feeling, too, was wonderful and new, nothing at all like any feeling Jim had ever felt on the street; there was no fight in it, no lies, no games, no race for nickels and dimes; vaguely he knew it was the feeling his chums all sneered at. The man wanted the lady. He wanted her harder and harder. The song rose and shook till Jim himself shook inside.

Now the lady was singing back, and in a moment Jim could feel that everything in the world was glad and quiet and true; there was no chance of losing anything, no fear, no suspense, no gamble; everything in the world was sure; and this would keep on forever. The trees and the bushes and flowers and clouds all seemed small beside it. No woman in the world had ever felt this way before!



Suddenly in the darkness the two little ragamuffins turned and gazed into each other's eyes, gazed and gazed, and neither of them even noticed the shameful fact that the other one's eyes were glistening.

A tremendous idea leaped up in Jim's mind, a plan for his whole life ahead! One long, bewildered, radiant stare. He squeezed the Italian's fat arm and turned quickly back, to hear the most wonderful thing of all, the richest thing. The two voices were singing two tunes, and each tune was helping the other.

\* \* \* \* \*

At midnight, as they hurried downtown together, Jim spoke in short excited sentences of his plan and the place for which they were heading. They reached it at last, a shabby little building 'way down near the East River docks, squeezed in between two black silent factory buildings. A low two-story house, a saloon below and a clubroom above; this room was rented for four dollars a month by Jim's street gang, and in it was an old piano.

They were too late. The saloon was dark and silent; doors and windows all were locked.

The bootblack looked at Jim. For a moment

he hesitated. Then he jerked from his trousers' back-pocket a sinister-looking tool, at sight of which Jim started, for he had seen tools like it before. The Italian watched him, in growing suspense. A brief struggle and then Jim grinned; the Italian drew a breath of relief, went to the side door and got to work on the lock, while Jim looked up and down the street for "cops," and shivered with excitement. A minute later the door swung open and they ran up into the clubroom.

It was still warm from the heat of the bar-room below, but bare and comfortless; the big, gay, exciting pictures on the walls were lost in shadows. But through the two grimy windows the hard bluish glare of the street arc light streamed in, throwing into bold relief the piano and the burly little Italian bending over the keys.

In a moment the old instrument woke up, uncertainly—as though dazed and embarrassed.—Slowly the notes flowed together into a rude grotesque ghost of the great Faust love song.

And then, eagerly, tenderly, very humbly, Lucky Jim began to sing.

The Italian turned his shaggy head and listened in amazement.

The minutes flowed on into hours as they slowly

remembered the wonderful songs of the show. The big dirty hands crept over the keys, making music coarse and clumsy, but somehow almost always in tune; and when the hands did strike it wrong, they shrank back quickly, and so went on, feeling their way.

And Jim sang softly—with eyes shining into the darkness.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was three o'clock when they had carefully fixed the lock of the door. Jim turned:

"What's your name?"

"Joe."

"Mine's Jim."

Jim drew a long shaking breath.

"Yes," he said, "that's what we'll do. We'll never stop till we die."

The bootblack drew close—his big eyes gleaming.

"You sing—I play!" he whispered. "De biggest songs in de world—all—all! We never stop till we die! You sing—I play!"

They stared at each other in silence.

"So long, Joe—till to-morrow night."

"So long, Jim."

Jim wandered down the street. As he walked,

his face changed and grew pinched with faintness. As before it had reflected all the gay fascination of the street's rush hour, so now it imaged the street's hour of death.

The Bowery was empty and cold and gray. The faces had all passed on—to the goals of their racing. Only here and there a few drunken sailors reeled along; ragged old bums sat dozing on lodging-house steps; a woman, haggard and hungry-eyed, stood watching by the entrance to a peep-show arcade—under the glaring show poster: "Illusions for One Cent." Only the pawn-shop windows were still bright and gay. The roar and the race for something had almost stopped. Not quite. An occasional train thundered above, a trolley flashed by, and down in Park Row he met the first newspaper wagon coming up on the gallop with the dawn edition, the news of the race and the roar, to be served red-hot to the early birds who were already rising to the fight. Further down, in the old place by Brooklyn Bridge, a few late workers were hurrying home, exhausted. And over by Wall Street the tall silent buildings loomed black and mysterious—waiting.

But Jim saw nothing.

He turned down a dark lane off Newspaper Row,

found his old warm grating, stepped carefully over a dozen ragged little sleepers, and lay down near the wall. A few restless changes of position, he pulled his hat down over his eyes, drew his belt in tighter, and was quiet. The glare of the light in the street showed only his little white jaw and slightly quivering nostrils. Deep exhausted breathing.

Up he drifted into the soft delicious darkness of sleep.

At last it grew brighter—in a dream. And Jim thrilled. From somewhere far behind him came the low sweet tones of a woman's voice, singing. The notes swelled, at first serene and tender, then deeper, nearer. Already Jim knew that song of love by heart, he knew the wonderful parts that were coming, and he tried to raise his head, but he could not move, though he knew not why.

The song swelled into deep passionate yearning, a rosy light stole from the darkness around him, and now he saw he was crouching over the dice. His chums crouched close around, he could hear their fierce whispers.

"Seven or eleven! Seven or eleven! Seven or eleven!" And the voice thrilled close behind him, deeper it swelled, and now there was nothing sad, it

was grand, uplifting, glorious! Little shivers raced up and down his spine, a lump rose again in his throat, he wanted to leap up and sing. But still his eyes were held down.

"Seven or eleven!" He shook the old dice box and threw; one eager look. He had won! He could go.

But no. The endless game went on—over and over, winning, losing, winning.

And the song was drifting away. Slowly that wonderful light died out. But still he could see the dice, still his eyes were fastened.

One last desperate struggle. Then darkness.

## CHAPTER III

“WHAT SORT OF A GAME IS THIS?”

**T**WO years had gone by.

Saturday night was beginning, and the long low Bowery bar-room was packed with jostling forms; big banging fists; thick clouds of smoke and coarse red jovial faces; the deep harsh hum of voices rose now into oaths or again into bursts of laughter.

All suddenly stopped. And one by one the faces turned to a corner in the rear—to a battered piano.

Over the yellow keys bent Dago Joe—larger, more thick-set, but foul and shaggy as before. And beside him, ready to sing, stood Lucky Jim; a little taller now and thinner, but on his broad dark face was the same strained eager look—etched deeper in. His black twinkling eyes roved over the faces; his hands, as he leaned slightly forward, were clinched tight in the pockets of his coat.

He began to sing. He felt the warm blood come leaping up through his veins, and his fresh crude

soprano voice leaped, too; leaped and shook and thrilled with the joy of being young, with the glorious passion of the music.

But the words. Never had the great Faust love song been so interpreted:

"I know—a girl who is—a—wait—in',  
Her face—is white, her lips—is—shak—in';  
She knows—that her George is off—a—drink—in'.  
I am—and while I drink, my heart—is—sink—in'.

I grab the bar tight!  
I feel I—must—fight!  
This curse inside me!  
Where can I hide me?  
I go on drink—in',  
My heart is sink—in',  
I go on dream—in',  
My eyes is stream—in'.  
With a big sad sob—I shout!  
I'm down—down an'—out!"

The room rang with delighted applause.

And as Jim went about with his hat, pennies and nickels came jingling in; again and again he was heartily clapped on the shoulder, for in these first two years of the life he and Joe had planned they



had come to be known and liked all up and down the Bowery.

But now, to all the kindly grins and words of praise, Jim replied only with a gay nervous smile. He was still tingling, warm, thrilling and shaking from the music.

His smile faded into a curious stare.

Over at a table in a corner sat a queer old German. Jim had never seen him before. His black felt hat was pushed far back from his high receding forehead; his white hair stood out soft and bushy round his face, which was smooth-shaven and square, with big cheek-bones. He had a wide mouth and thin delicate lips, with a humorous droop to the corners, lips now comfortably set around the stem of a long straight black-briar pipe. The lips opened lazily and soft, white wreaths floated up, and through the wreaths two deep-set kindly blue eyes twinkled at Jim.

He beckoned Jim to come over, and pointed to a fiddle-box on a chair.

"In de same beesness as you," he remarked, watching Jim's half-suspicious eyes. "Und mein name ees Fritz Bernstene. Hello!" he cried, bobbing around. "Kellner! Two glasses of beer—for me und mein freund."

With a quick pleased smile Jim slid into the opposite chair. Old Fritz drew a deep comfortable breath.

"Vell," he began, "your song ees goot—fine—immense—in places. It seems to me I hear before already. Vot ees it? Vere you get it?"

He lit his pipe, as Jim told briefly of the night long ago at the wonderful big show. The old man grunted:

"So!" His little eyes twinkled in the blaze. "How you make dose words?"

Jim's broad face suddenly darkened.

"I know what you're thinking," he began slowly, in low uneasy tones. "You ain't like these other fellers—are you?—you know what's good in music—so you're thinking the words is bad. Well—I know they are. The song is glad an' the words ought to be glad, like the song. But——" he swallowed hard and looked up with a guilty smile. "Well—you see, me an' the Dago—we made a plan—jest to—sing big glad music—always. So I quit sellin' papers an' he quit blackin' boots an' we got singin'. But they didn't want us at the opera when we asked at the ticket-window—an' the only place we could sing in was joints like this. I didn't have any words for the song, an' some feller made

these words—an'—I tore 'em up! But—the crowd got 'round me an' made me try 'em, an'—the crowd liked 'em an'—the crowd gave us money—an'—so now it ain't—it ain't much like the song in the big show—is it?—I know that—it's got dirt—slush—soft slush all over it!"

Jim stopped short, his hands nervously working on the table, his face very red, and his eyes looking down.

Old Fritz bent 'way forward:

"You are right! Dose words—dey haf no big beauties. Mein freund—you sing too goot to sing dose words. You must haf quick anudder song!"

"Well?" Jim looked up quickly. "Where can I get it?"

The old man emptied his glass.

"You come along mit me!"

He half rose, but again he saw that quick look of suspicion in Jim's big eyes. He sank down and shook his head.

"Yes—you haf a splendid voice," he said, slowly. "Und dot song would suit you goot. A song mit words all fine und true—so true; und shoost in de middle ees a high place vere your voice goes up in jumps—up—up—up! Till you grab dot high note und make it shake! Und you could

do it, too! Vell, now I haf no time. Maybe I see you again."

He turned and seemed listening to a jovial group at the bar.

"Say!" Jim bent over the table and touched his arm. "How far is it to your place?"

Fritz glanced down as though undecided.

"Oh, show a feller!"

"Goot!"

They rose quickly and left the bar-room.

Out in the white frosty night the old man breathed deep till his big cheeks grew ruddy; he bent his head to the wind, hugged his fiddle and hurried on.

"What's in it for the old one?" Jim was thinking.

Suddenly he stopped; Fritz turned and they stared at each other a moment. Not a word was said, but slowly the old eyes triumphed. The old hand went up on Jim's shoulder.

But at its touch Jim shook it off and ran away.

Old Fritz walked slowly on down the street.

Back in the shadows Jim followed. He saw the old German walk faster and at last turn sharply into a dark tenement entry. A moment later Jim slipped cautiously in behind and tip-toed upstairs.

He heard old Bernstene stop and whistle a bold clear little tune—(a motif from *Die Walküre*)—that sounded like a question. Fritz listened for an answer, but none came; he climbed to the third landing and tried the door; it was locked, and he wearily fumbled for his key.

But as Fritz entered the pitch-dark room he gave a startled grunt.

“Don’t you dare to open your eyes!” cried a low sweet excited voice. Jim saw two small hands grab the old shoulders, and old Fritz was hustled, still grunting, back into the lighted bedroom. The bedroom door was shut and locked.

“What sort of a game is this?” thought Jim, and he stared excitedly in from the entry.

He saw a small white form move quickly about in the dull red glow from a little coal fire; he heard rippling chuckles, and then a match blazed round a yellow head, a demure little face, laughing twitching red lips and very large steady blue eyes. Jim drew back in disgust.

“Only a girl!” he whispered.

The girl was about his own age. She was lighting a lamp in the corner farthest from the door, and as the soft light poured out she carefully placed over it a big pale blue shade which made it even

softer. The whole room was quiet and warm. The walls were just plain gray, with two windows curtained in dull faded red; in one corner was a baby-grand piano with piles of music on top; a huge deep leather chair stood facing the fire, with an enormous old pair of slippers in front, and close by the arm a small low table already set with a snowy cloth and two empty plates; cold meat, thin crisp pieces of toast peeping from under a napkin, a yellow pat of butter, apple sauce, a smoking bowl of something, a huge delicious frankfurter sausage and an old black tea-pot humming.

Now she herself was humming like an idiot, and taking, over her shoulder, a last anxious look at her dress.

The dress was evidently new, but of the queerest style—dark-blue stuff hanging in straight folds from her waist; and folded criss-cross over her bosom was a big soft white cloth; her neck was quite bare, and her smooth hair was braided in one big German ring round her head.

Still humming, she skipped to the bedroom door, and out marched the old German.

His face was lined with cross wrinkles and at every step he grunted.

But suddenly turning he swept the girl with him

into the deep old chair, and for a moment Jim heard nothing but a lot of laughs and mumbles and—kisses!

Jim drew a deep breath of disappointment; for the Dutchman had seemed such a manly square old fellow.

The girl was standing up now between the chair and the fire, turning slowly around, while old Fritz examined her dress. Her head kept twisting anxiously.

"Daddy, don't you like it?"

No response.

"Daddy, I made it myself! Don't you *dare* not to say something!"

She turned sharply and saw the old man's adoring eyes; she bent and seized his face in both her hands and gazed—hungrily; and then with a little cry of delight she hugged him; and again they went into the chair.

At last Jim heard the old German's voice—muffled, trembling and very low.

"Shoost like I dreamed you would look—shoost so vas *her* dress ven she vas so little as you. Vell," the voice grew quiet and confident as though stating indisputable facts, "you haf been kind all day. No bad music—no cry-baby eyes—no lazy work."

For answer, a small hand shot out to a straw chair and pulled in a pile of embroidery.

"Ach! Gretchen! Vot a beauty! Vell! All by yourself? Und your mistress, Fraulein Louisa, she likes it much? Und you please all peoples in de great house—und—und so you grow vun day older." The voice sank 'way down. "So soon—mein baby—grows—like vun of Gott's beauty flowers. So soon—so soon."

Another long silence. At last the two heads came up again and supper began. As the delicious odors of tea and toast and sausage stole over the room, Jim kept shifting from one foot to another, staring through the half-opened door.

Slowly in his dark tired eyes would appear a strange new look that grew and grew till the soul of Lucky Jim seemed looking straight out, dazed, hungry and wondering. But then in a flash the street's old cynical smile would come back; it came more and more as Jim grew wearier; he smiled when she lit the old man's pipe after supper; and when she sat down at the piano, playing a soft old song—then Jim positively snorted. The little idiot was playing ten times too slow.

Fritz heard and threw a startled glance at the



door and saw, but looked back before Jim noticed him.

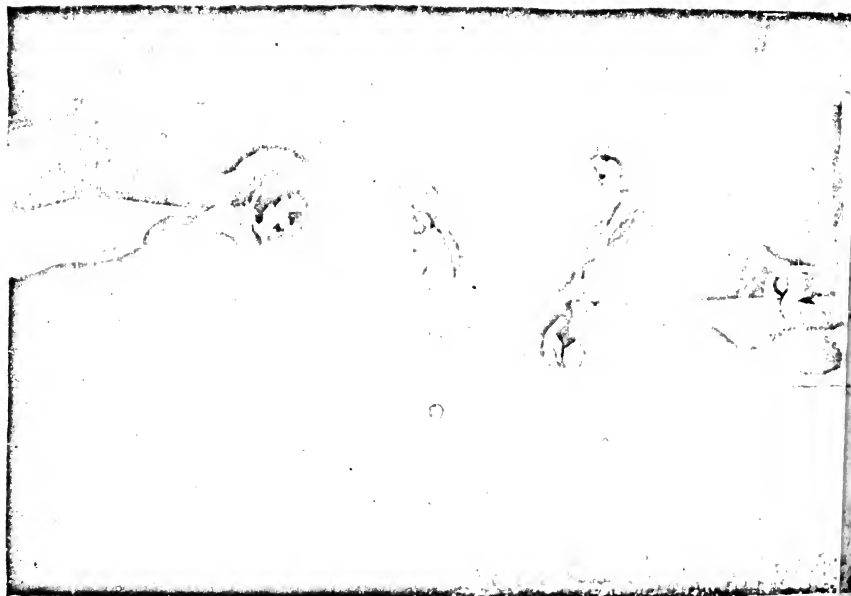
For a long time his blue eyes stared into the coals. Then he rose and took out his fiddle.

"Ve play anudder song to-night," he said to Gretchen. "Vun you know so vell."

Tenderly he tucked the old fiddle under his chin, and his cheek went 'way down, his face grew quiet and peaceful, and his eyes closed as though shutting out every evil thing in the world and seeing another world of radiant "big beauties;" he bent slightly forward smiling and his white head nestled closer.

"He knows how it feels," thought Jim. "He knows just how it feels!"

So he did. The melody stole out from under the curly bent head; it rose serenely, telling the whole simple story in one phrase, and yet making you close your eyes to listen, for you knew that more was coming. Again it rose, but wandering now by different paths, and again straying back, softer and softer—and pausing; and again beginning, but now slowly filling with sorrow, despairing, very humble—then suddenly swelling and leaping! But this was quickly hushed, the agony slipped away, and the same old melody rose softer, more humble and



"The sweet, crude voice of Lucky Jim crept on softly and uncertain—following the fiddle."



more serene—drifting slowly up and up and floating away into infinite peace.

The little room was solemn and hushed. Old Fritz still bent his head until he felt Gretchen clutch his arm.

And then he saw Jim standing directly before him, motionless, looking up.

Old Fritz smiled.

"Dot ces your song," he whispered.

Jim thrilled with a joy that was strange and yet felt so safe and sure. He felt his throat thicken, he swallowed hard and his eyes winked desperately.

Fritz saw this and turned, and in a moment he was talking cheerily. He made Jim eat some supper while Gretchen made more tea. Slowly Jim felt the shivers and shakes die away, and he began to feel quiet as the room around him.

When Fritz saw this, they went to the piano, and while Gretchen played, the sweet crude voice of Lucky Jim crept on softly and uncertain—following the fiddle.

They finished and began a second time, and then a third, till the voice rose loud and free, swelling and leaping and dying! And now the melody had changed, the serenity was all lost, the song spoke only bursts of yearning. Faster, hungrier, wilder!

Gretchen's face kept turning from the keys; her blue eyes were startled, confused, fascinated—growing larger and rounder. Her hands fumbled, her accompaniment dragged.

Jim glanced down at her fiercely. Faster, wilder! The song of the life of Lucky Jim! The voice of the street!

And when the song was finished, the old German's head was still bent down, and his eyes were glistening.

"Some day you vill go up—up—vay up!" he whispered.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE SONG OF THE CENTURY—SATURDAY NIGHT IN THE CAFE RIP VAN WINKLE

**W**HEN Jim left old Fritz that night he felt his whole life beginning anew; he saw a long succession of lessons and wonderful songs in the lamp-lit room; he heard his own voice far inside of his head grow swiftly deeper and richer, until in just a few minutes of hard work and lessons the voice was resonant, vibrating and lifting, like the voice of the man in the big show. He heard a rising flutter and tumult, and then a roar of applause; the whole world listened while he sang! Deep feelings burst up within him and drowned it all!

And Jim was walking alone through a dark cold tenement street in the Ghetto.

"You vill go up—up—vay up!"

These words still rang in his ears; he walked on faster and took deep breaths.

"*Will I work? Will I?*"

He laughed excitedly.

"*Will* I? Gee! But isn't he a wonder!"

Every suspicion was swept away; the simple old German had suddenly become a marvel of human perfection, of goodness and wisdom and genius and love.

But then came the drop.

Fritz gave Jim long hard lessons with no songs at all but only new queer ways of breathing, new ways of holding his tongue and of lifting the small red thing in his throat—until Jim wondered if it were really his own mouth that was singing.

All this Jim did eagerly, glaring into his mouth in the mirror and trying and laughing and trying again.

Next Fritz told Jim he must give up his night singing with Joe, and get a steady common day-time job at work in the open air.

Even then Jim obeyed, and hunted and found a job, and did the deadly tiresome work for a week.

But then the old street reached up.

"Say!" growled Dago Joe, with fists clenched and dull eyes gleaming. "Do I wanta stoppa you from de big glad song? Do I? Don't I wanta you go up in de big show some day? Don't I wanta to go up myself? Ain't we been plannin' how we

be two bigga glad men—always togedder—you sing—I play?”

Never before had silent Joe spoken so long at a time, his broad jaw set hard, and he drew closer.

“Well—you try droppa me—you try!”

And as Jim’s black eyes flashed back undaunted, Joe added with almost a sob:

“I lika you so bad that—when I killa you,” he jerked out his knife and clutched it to his ragged breast, “den I quick killa my ownself too! You try!”

Then came the gay shrewd leader of Jim’s old newsboy gang—“the Skinner,” who was now seventeen and a messenger on Wall Street.

“You—poor—fool!” he sneered. “So de old Dutch has you at last. Goin’ to be papa’s boy, trottin’ patient to his daily toil—saved from de booze—picked from de fire—marry de girl—save an’ scrape an’ trot de baby—grow old in de same pair of pants—an’ at de age of eighty buy a sweet little house an’ lot—‘De Bride’s Dream’—on installments—in Hoboken!”

Then when he saw Jim’s eyes blaze at just the right heat, the Skinner changed—as though by impulse.

“Look here, Lucky!” He spoke sharply, but at



that moment his shrewd gray eyes and hard lean freckled face showed more real feeling of the soft kind than they had ever shown before. "Don't miss it. You know I'm with you all de time. You've got a star voice! You've got more nerve than any feller I ever played against! You're a little winner! Now don't miss it. You can have all de money in sight, it's just waiting. And you *have* to have it! Don't mind what de old Dutch says. Is he a star in a show? No! He's slow, an' now he wants you to learn the same slow tricks. Hold on! Don't talk yet! Come in here!"

The wise Skinner had turned their walk to the cafe Rip Van Winkle.

He now pushed Jim in the wide doors—into the great square gilded noisy room, with the little blue clouds of cigar smoke rising into the painted vault of the ceiling.

He pushed through to a gay boisterous crowd at a table near the music.

"Here he is, Bill—now fix him, quick!"

And before the waiter could hustle them out, the Skinner's big jolly friend—a Wall Street broker—had seized Jim and boosted him up on the musicians' platform, and turning about had roared:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I take pleasure in announcing 'Faust; or, the Drunkard's Dream,' as sung for two years in every saloon on the Bowery—by Lucky Jim, the gambler."

A tumult of surprise and clapping.

Jim took one look down into the lights and flashing jewels and sparkling eyes. He felt the old luck swell in him!

He took a step forward and began to sing.

At first his voice felt loud and strange. But then as he sang he could feel this rich gay crowd listening, just as the tough old Bowery crowds had listened, first laughing delightedly at the words in the opening verses, then changing as the crude soprano voice took hold, half of them staring right up into his eyes.

It's a wonderful warm feeling to see a whole crowd of eyes stare at you like that—especially the eyes of rich beautiful ladies.

Jim could feel his voice soar out and thrill, his hands went into his coat-pockets, and he leaned forward, holding all those eyes and making them glisten. He drank it in and grew warm, and the warmth went into his rough glorious song. The song grew glad, again the old words were dragged up into brightness—a grotesque startling contrast

of youth and decay. Jim's head went back, his eyes closed, and the voice simply poured out quivering!

And then he sat down with the Skinner's friends, sipping delicious hot red punch, silent—his eyes roving around the cafe.

The "Rip" was raising the roof. The street's glorious race was on the home-stretch, Jim could feel it in his blood—like the hot punch that made him tingle. Not the soul, but the very flesh and blood of music! It danced and flashed out of eyes, it thrilled in loud laughs and fast excited voices. Parties got all mixed up, strange hands were grasped and pulled closer, feet and hands beat time. For the Hungarian orchestra had had plenty of cognac, and now with glistening eyes they jerked and scraped fiddles and shouted. The "Rip" rocked and swayed. Six college students, a marine engineer just ashore, a Jewish lawyer, two Wall Street brokers and a Tammany politician—began shouting together that vague mysterious old song: "The smoke goes up the chimbley just the same!"

Then up rose a sharp abominable fascinating college cheer. Wild applause!

From another corner rose two old graybeards:

"Kai-yoo! Kai-yoo! Kai-yoo! Who are you? Kansas!"

The marine engineer leaped up, roaring:

"All hands to the tops!" He jumped on a table; and again the smoke went up the chimbley, the proprietor grew anxious and protested, and the engineer shut his eyes and yelled:

"Bring in all the proprietors in the world and *all* the waiters and *all* the fiddlers an' all an' all and let's *all* have a drink!"

And Lucky Jim was still silent.

He felt a hot nervous hand on his shoulder.

"This is it—money!" whispered the Skinner.

Jim took a long shaking breath and smiled.

But soon he heard the roar die down. Faces were turning to the musicians' platform.

Faintly, from 'way up above the noise, a simple melody came floating down. Jim looked sharply around.

He shut his eyes and trembled. He could feel it come; as the talking and laughing and chuckling scattered and died down, it came louder but softer and warmer—and to Jim it was not the sound of a fiddle, but the very voice of old Fritz:

"Vay up—up—to big beauties—vill you come? Vill you? Vill you?"

Jim's nerves had been strained to the highest pitch; this question suddenly filled all his tingling inside. And when it died away he was thrilled by the silence and then by the roar of applause.

But when in a moment more the crowd forgot the whole song and went on with its laughing and shouting, then Jim stared over at the face of old Fritz, who was watching him from the orchestra. He saw the anxiety hidden under the twinkling blue eyes, and his sudden wave of admiring love as suddenly changed, and he thought to himself:

"Poor old feller—poor old feller!"

And a moment later he too had forgotten old Fritz and soared on up with the crowd.

Another glass of punch—sweet, sharp and hot, racing down the throat and creeping out through legs and arms and fingers, making his heart pound and his soul whirl.

And again the crowd roared and laughed and lived. Ladies' eyes flashed like big soft jewels. And the room rocked to the rag-time. Once more the Skinner leaned close, whispering:

"Money!"

And at this Jim dizzily rose; he stared round and round, he leaped up on the table; and then, with hands and arms swaying, eyes sparkling,

breast heaving, soprano voice strained to the highest pitch, he led the crowd in the song of flesh and blood and nerves; the song of the street and the race and the jerk and the roar, the soul of the century—rag-time!

## CHAPTER V

### A GOOD SOUND TALK ON AMERICAN BUSINESS

**J**IM old man!"

Jim looked up with a quick pleased smile. The "Rip's" proprietor always called him that.

The man stood smiling down, with his warm, soft jeweled hand on Jim's ragged shoulder. It was Saturday night, three weeks after Jim's first triumph.

"Jim old man come over here."

They went to a corner table.

Jim felt suddenly suspicious. He looked hard at the proprietor—but the big man's eyes only twinkled back:

"You're a sharp one, Jim. You've been watching me for the last three weeks. Now what do you think?"

"I think you're square."

Jim was right. The proprietor was a square straightforward man of business.

He leaned back and Jim leaned forward

"Jim, I like you. And you like me. Why? Because we both mean business; business is a fight for money—and we're both good fighters. You have a voice and I have a cafe. So far my cafe is better than your voice, because there's more money in it. How did I make it so? By watching every chance and grabbing it. I've gone to Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Buda Pesth—always watching. Every good thing I see I bring here, and then I make it work. I have to, because there are hundreds of other cafes fighting me all over New York. Now Jim—there are thousands of singers—fighting *you* all over New York."

He paused, watching Jim's hands work nervously.

"And I think you will beat them."

Jim's face brightened.

"But you won't if you try to go slow. You've got to grab the chance when it comes. It came with you here—three weeks ago. You grabbed it, you made a hit and you have come every night since, and I've let you come. Why? Because I saw you were the kind that wins. You went at it hard, you made it ring! But since then you've stopped; you've been going slow; you sing as though you're afraid of hurting something; you



only sing once and you go home at ten o'clock. You act like an old man—or as though an old man were holding you back."

He looked over at old Fritz in the orchestra, and Jim looked too.

"Now Jim—what has that done? Why, they don't applaud as they did? First, because you sing as I said, and second, because you leave before they are well livened up. So you make only half the money you did—I don't want that. My Hungarians sing hard, they forget everything and just throw heart and soul into the music. So can you—and beat them all—if you want to. If you don't—then I don't want you here."

"What?" Jim felt something drop inside of him.

The proprietor smiled kindly.

"No, Jim—because I hate to see a star man waste himself. I like stars. I hate losers. I only have one loser here—and he's only here because he's such a queer old fiddler that he makes variety in the programme."

He watched Jim again look quickly over at old Fritz.

"Yes," he said, "I want men with me who are rising fast. I want you. I want you to make piles

of money. Why?—Not because I am your friend—though I do like you, but because I'm watching this cafe every minute, and I want men who will boom themselves and the cafe together. I want you to feel you are fighting with me against other cafes. See? And fight as I fight, with every ounce of strength!

"Now here's my proposition: You go on singing—as you are—with your friend Joe to play. I'd rather let him go, but you wouldn't agree to that." As he saw Jim's face flush he added: "You see I know you. So let Joe play and pass his hat for the nickels. *Your* money is in dollars, and it comes from me. But I don't pay by the week. I pay for what you do. It all rests with you whether you get rich or stay poor. I pay you only for encores.

"Now here's my advice: Sing first just at the close of the table d'hôte, when the men begin smoking. After that go about and talk to the ladies if they seem to want you; tell them about sleeping out as a newsboy; tell them about the time when you were Lucky Jim the gambler; make them like you. They will—and that makes encores. When they ask you to sing, tell them I won't let you. Keep them waiting. They'll think I'm a brute and they will want you all the harder. They will send for

me, and I'll give in and you'll sing. And *that* makes encores. Keep most of your singing until eleven o'clock or later, for then they are at their highest. And *that* makes encores. See what I mean? Watch your people all the time.

"And here's how I pay: For every encore before eleven o'clock, 25 cents, and for every double encore, 60 cents. After eleven o'clock for every encore, 50 cents, and for every double encore, a dollar."

A moment he watched Jim's face suddenly glowing and the hands clinching each other tight, and then he added, slowly:

"For no encores—nothing. And if you sing three nights running without a single encore—then I will ask you to go away."

Jim fell back in his chair, but his eyes never left the eyes of the other.

"Now Jim old man," the man leaned over kindly, "don't you see? I'm honest. It's a plain open business proposition. It's nothing new. Every successful business man uses it to-day, and that's why this country beats Europe. It's just a simple scheme to make every man do his best. You can get rich or stay poor—just as you choose. What do you say?"

The proprietor smiled.

Jim was staring straight before him. After a minute he smiled back—a little.

“I guess I know how I’ll choose. But—if I sing and get paid only for encores—I’ll sing hard—I know I will—awful hard! Suppose I sing too hard and spoil my voice? The old one said I would—and the old one knows.”

The proprietor made a quick gesture of annoyance, but as he looked over at old Fritz his face softened into the genial pitying kindness of a strong man for a weak one.

“Poor old chap—look at him.”

Jim looked over at Fritz and then turned back slowly.

“How did you know he was the one I meant?”

“Look at him again.”

Jim looked and saw Fritz staring at them anxiously.

The proprietor smiled.

“Poor old chap—it isn’t hard to know what *he* thinks. Ever since you came I have noticed that look on his face. It’s the same old look, I’ve seen it on him a dozen times in the last ten years, and it means he is trying to ‘save a voice.’ Kind simple old Fritz!”

Jim looked up in surprise. There was no mistaking; the proprietor was not pretending kindness; he really meant it.

"Why—you—like him," said Jim, slowly.

"Like him? Of course I do. Every one does." The proprietor gave a half-annoyed little laugh. "We all like him and that's just the danger. He's a regular old grandfather, always looking for grandsons with voices. He gets a promising young singer, treats him so kindly the youngster grows fond of him, and then old Fritz begins '*saving*' the youngster's voice. If he only could save it, I'd give him a fat salary just for that purpose. But he don't save a voice—he preserves it. He gives you all sorts of queer old Dutch ways of breathing and holding your tongue and God knows what else. I have no doubt he has given them all to you, so you know about how it works. You get so you hardly know your own mouth. And it *isn't* yours, it's a mouth Fritz has made. I don't say this new mouth might not learn to sing—some time—when you are as old as Fritz. But the trouble is, most of us want to sing while we're young. So most of Fritz's grandsons break away in a few months and come back here and just sing with their own mouths. Ask Fritz if they

don't. So they've wasted two or three months with nothing to show."

"Now Jim *I'm* not trying to re-shape your mouth; I believe a man can sing best with the mouth God gave him. But I *will* give you just one pointer. Don't—waste—time! You can't afford it. This business is a race—you are up against ten thousand others all fighting you.

"No doubt Fritz has told you it isn't a fight. 'We are all brothers—each helping the other.' But we're not. It don't work out. 'Be good and you'll be happy, but damn lonesome.' That's Fritz. He *is happy*. He was happy when I first found him here, running a one-room cafe called 'The Little Room.' Everybody liked him and owed him money. The poor old chap just made enough to live on, and that was all he wanted. Most of us want more. I did. That's why I've made the place what it is, and that's why I can pay old Fritz more now in salary than he got before when he was owner. You may think I pay him more than he is worth because I like him. Well, that may have a little to do with it. But the main reason is that old Fritz's solo takes with the public. Why? Because it's the song of Brotherhood and that sort of thing, and the public likes just a touch of it—no more. And so

Fritz has lived his kind of life and sung his kind of song, and this is just about as far up as it takes him. Is this all you want? If you do, I don't want you here.

"Because Jim the thing *you* want is a quick rise —'way up! And in this country you get that by throwing yourself body and soul into your work! You don't get it by saving yourself. How do *you* know what your voice will be a year from now? Use it while you've got it. Make money—Jim—drink in life, drink in this glorious flesh-and-blood life around you; watch your public, talk with 'em, know 'em, fool with 'em and then sing it all back to 'em—and you'll rise quick!

"By Jove! Those Hungarians are wonders, aren't they?"

The orchestra had suddenly swept from a slow, dreamy prelude into the deep seductive throb of "*Sourire d'Avril*."

To Jim, the very air seemed swaying, and the blood grew warm in his veins.

He watched one beautiful lady near him.

She was very young. She had just come in from the theatre; her rich gray fur cape was thrown far back, her black dress was all sparkling with silver and cut 'way down; Jim watched the velvet bands

that held it to the shoulders; he watched the shoulders move and the lips move and the brown eyes move—and dance! And then the eyes met his—and Jim leaned suddenly forward.

“That’s it—Jim,” the proprietor whispered. “Sing it back to her—now! That Italian love song! Quick!”

And before Jim could tear his eyes from the brown ones he was on the platform and Joe’s coarse clumsy beautiful chords were waiting.

He sang the song that Joe had learned ten years before on the streets of Naples. The music felt better than Fritz’s music, the song was warm and rich and glad as the lady herself; Jim’s deep pure voice shook, and the big eyes of the lady glistened, her small lips smiled; and the cafe looked on and saw, and understood; and when Jim finished, the whole room rang with applause.

Jim felt his heart suddenly bound, for she was beckoning!

He sat with her party till midnight, next to her, talking fast and low, telling them about his old life on the street, about Joe and the Skinner, and “craps,” then stopping short and staring at his wine glass.



He felt the brown eyes smiling at him. He shivered 'way inside.

"Jimmy, do you know—I came down here just to hear you sing. I heard all about you from Gretchen."

"Gretchen! Oh, you're—why, you must be—Miss Louise!"

"Yes. And Gretchen is a little dear!" She turned to the other. "The quaintest little mädchen—she does stunning old German embroidery—I'll show her to you some night."

Jim scowled. There was something in her tone he disliked. But when her wonderful eyes beamed down again he forgot everything. Again the deep shiver.

"And the queerest old dear of a German daddy!" she went on. "I'll have him, too—to play his fiddle. Why, there he is now! Look at him!"

As they all turned around, Jim saw old Fritz's face suddenly bend to his fiddle as though to hide something.

The eyes of Miss Louise grew soft again.

"Poor simple old man—he lives in a quiet old-fashioned little heaven that just grew out of his fiddle. He knows about as much of things in this big outside world—as I do!"

They all laughed. They had a way of laughing so quickly, these gay people, changing from sad to gay in one twinkle of the lady's big eyes.

When the whole gay bewildering evening was over, the genial proprietor took Jim's arm again and said:

"Jim old man—you've done it. Here's your pay for to-night."

He poured nine shining quarters into Jim's hand.

"And this is nothing. If you can bring champagne people like that here—real big ones Jim—extra dry—then I'll raise wages in a month. And *that* is nothing! Why Jim if you make friends with people like that, they'll lift you 'way up and your future is made in a minute! That's what money can do. I think you're ready to shake hands. Aren't you? Good! Now look here, Jim," his voice lowered, "there's old Fritz waiting. I don't have to tell *you* this—but—treat him kindly. Don't drop him too quick, it would break him all up. Don't—don't hurt him. Why don't you walk home with him? Poor kind old Fritz!"

Jim turned slowly and saw Fritz watching. And Jim smiled—kindly. Fritz's little blue eyes twinkled, as with an effort. Jim could see how he

felt. He hurried over quickly and they went out together.

The proprietor smiled.

Poor old Fritz.

## CHAPTER VI

### A BEAUTIFUL SWEATSHOP FOR VOICES

**P**OOOR old Fritz. How slow he walked. Lucky Jim felt more like running, but instead he kept carefully in step and glanced sideways and noticed that he himself was taller than the old figure bent down to push against the strong night wind. Poor old Fritz. What a square old fellow he was, and how he loved the girl, and how she loved him. How kind he had been to Lucky, what a bully little room it was, what good times they had there—simple little times. What a pity the old man knew so little of the world, what a shame he had not succeeded in life and had missed the *real* big things that money brings. But he should have them now. Jim would raise them both up with him, 'way up—quick! But he would sing as he thought best. Still, he could listen to Fritz's advice; let the old man think he was helping. How slow he walked. Poor old Fritz.

"If you want to run," cried Fritz, stopping short,

"vy don't you?" He glared up with such a ludicrous mixture of indignation, despair and twinkle in his eyes, as though he had read Jim's every thought, that Lucky's startled stare changed to a smile, and then he laughed heartily, and so did Fritz.

"Vell!" cried Fritz at last, "I laugh—I laugh like a Frenchman!"

But the laugh soon died out of his eyes, and as they walked on, frequent grunts showed how anxiously he was thinking.

Back in the old room he spoke:

"Jimmy, some day I vill talk. Now—nothing—it ees better so. Only this—you are young und strong, you feel quick, you vant to sing quick. I can't stop you. Effery man must sing his own song. But let me help, Jimmy—let me help! Think of me vat you vill, smile, laugh, say I'm old! But let me help so you don't spoil dot voice! Remember—vunce—I helped a voice—only vunce, but vunce so high! Now it sings in de opera in Berlin und Vienna—so fine! Ach! So fine! Remember, Jimmy, vunce I did!"

He looked up eagerly, with one hand on Jim's shoulder. The hand shook. Lucky looked away.

"Jimmy, you need in your life some quiet—goot

food, goot sleep und help for de voice. Maybe—you like to—come here—und live—yes?”

Jim turned and squeezed the old hand hard.

“Yes!” he whispered.

\* \* \* \* \*

So Jim had wonderful suppers and a bedroom, small but spotlessly clean; he learned from Gretchen countless tricks about cleanliness and other things; and he felt sometimes in a bewildered, half-pleased way, that he was growing civilized.

But this seemed small beside that absorbing twilight hour when Fritz worked with him on his voice. This hour was filled for Jim with the same new feeling of smallness that he had felt the first night when Fritz played the fiddle, a feeling of humility before something far away and radiant—Fritz’s “World of Big Beauties.” He wanted to work forever, climbing slowly toward it. So he dreamed in the twilight.

But in the evening, in the sparkle of lights and eyes and the throb of the waltz and the rag-time, there grew the other feeling of joy before something close and warm and tingling, he wanted to reach out at once with his voice and hold all the eyes and make them burn.

Soon all the cafe grew to know him; his fame

traveled on uptown, where the rich people heard that a wonderful boy soprano had appeared in the "Rip." They flocked down, and Jim's wages were raised. And the honest proprietor smiled.

Jim had anxious mornings in the empty cafe, learning Joe's beloved old songs from Naples.

It was wonderful how Joe had grown to know the piano. No one knew where he practiced or how. He played nothing but accompaniments for Jim—a background of coarse rich beauty—fierce and throbbing and crashing—the very street itself! But sometimes low and dreamy and full of passionate yearnings; and in moments like these—with his big grimy hands caressing the keys, Joe would gaze up at Jim and listen; and the look in his eyes was as though he had found one bright beautiful song in a world of clashing discords, and would be ready to give his life or his soul, or any one else's soul, if the time ever came when that song was in danger.

Danger was already near.

The proprietor kept smilingly insisting that Jim should chat between songs with the ladies. Little by little Jim yielded to their amused admiring questions about his life as a gambler; he began painting himself as a slum "character," and acted the part.

He saw more and more of the wise shrewd "Skinner" and the old street gang; again, for hours at a time, he saw only the dice.

And as Jim became more and more his old street self, the old fever, the longing to seize a chance and rise quick without work, burned steadily fiercer.

He understood the proprietor now. He was in the fight body and soul; he sang for money and applause.

And when the spring drew on and rich people began leaving town and the flood of money lessened, then he sang harder still, spurred on by a vague fear that his hold on the public was breaking.

And when all this began to tell on his voice, he only tried fiercely to clear off the hoarseness.

At such moments in a song he would hear low furious curses behind him; he would glance around at Joe impatiently.

As the hoarseness grew worse night after night, the curses and growls deepened. Jim grew steadily more irritable, and at last, one night at the end of a song he turned sharply:

"Look here Dago! Quit your swearin'! What's wrong, anyhow?"

Dago Joe looked up still angry but with pain in his eyes, as though Jim's words had cut deep.



Lucky saw this and impulsively took Joe into the little rear room for a drink.

"Dago! What's wrong?"

"You—killa de voice!"

Joe spoke low—his thick voice shaking.

"Say—you remember dat woman old an' thin—so long ago when we was kids—my mudder. She come in de saloon an' swear an' pull me out—she come wid me to our room—she crie! She worka hard, hard for me—she sew de coats an' pants in de sweatshop! So she go sick—she cough—she cough! No worka now—I play here in de 'Rip'! I take money! Doctor, bottles, sticking cloth! I sit up all night! No use! She die."

He leaned over the table.

"She die from de sweatshop! Well, here it is a sweatshop too! You killa de voice! You——"

Joe swung round sharply. The proprietor stood close behind him.

"Trying to scare Jim, eh? It's good Jim's nerve is too strong for you. Come Jim old man, they want another song. Here—drink up, it will help you."

He smiled down encouragingly as Jim's face slowly tightened.

"By the way Jimmy, I noticed a little hoarseness

in your voice to-night. Been bothering you a good deal lately? Well now why didn't you come to me? I've got some dope that will make you think you're a nightingale! All ready? Good—come on. And say Jim give 'em that sad one: 'Cheer Up Father For Mother's Got A Job!' Give it to 'em hard. Make 'em howl! Things are too quiet to-night!"

He turned, angrily to Joe:

"Stop! Not you!"

Joe turned slowly back. Jim had gone. One moment the big handsome man and the short burly boy of nineteen looked at each other. The proprietor gave a short laugh of disgust:

"You needn't go out that door. I've told another man to play his accompaniment. *That* door will be more in your line." He pointed to a door into the alley. "I've done with you. You only got here in the beginning through Jim, and yet you do nothing but mope and scowl—because you are jealous! That's why!"

"Is it?"

Joe's deep chest swelled under the red handkerchief, the muscles of his swarthy neck stood out, but his big dull eyes only looked straight at the proprietor.

"Yes! Get out! I'm done with you!"

"But I—I ain't done—wid you!"

Joe's face grew livid and his hand jumped into his bosom. But it stopped and fell; he turned slowly and went out.

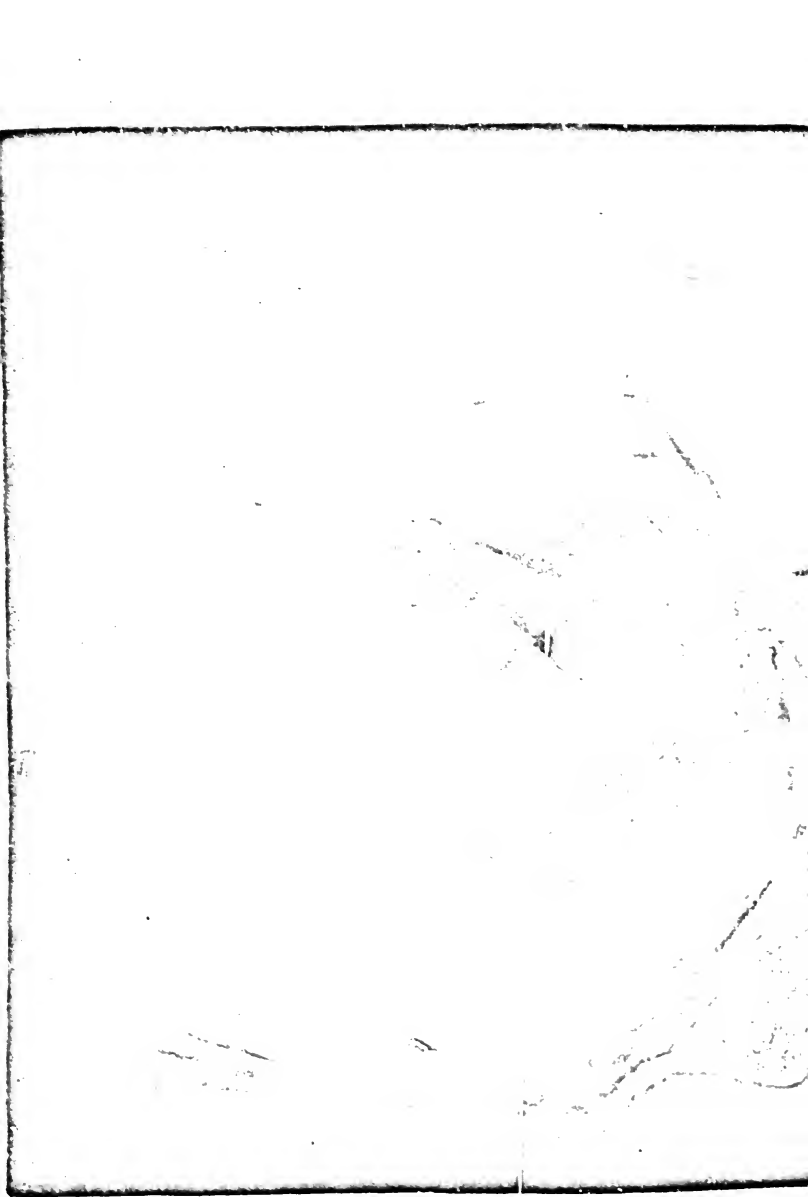
All that evening the proprietor encouraged Jim, and Jim drank and sang, and felt the rasping in his throat, and drank again.

And long after midnight, when he reached home, he stumbled again and again on the steep dark stairs; he fumbled vainly with his key for the lock; in the room he knocked over a chair, and at the noise he collapsed into the big leather chair and huddled up close and shivered.

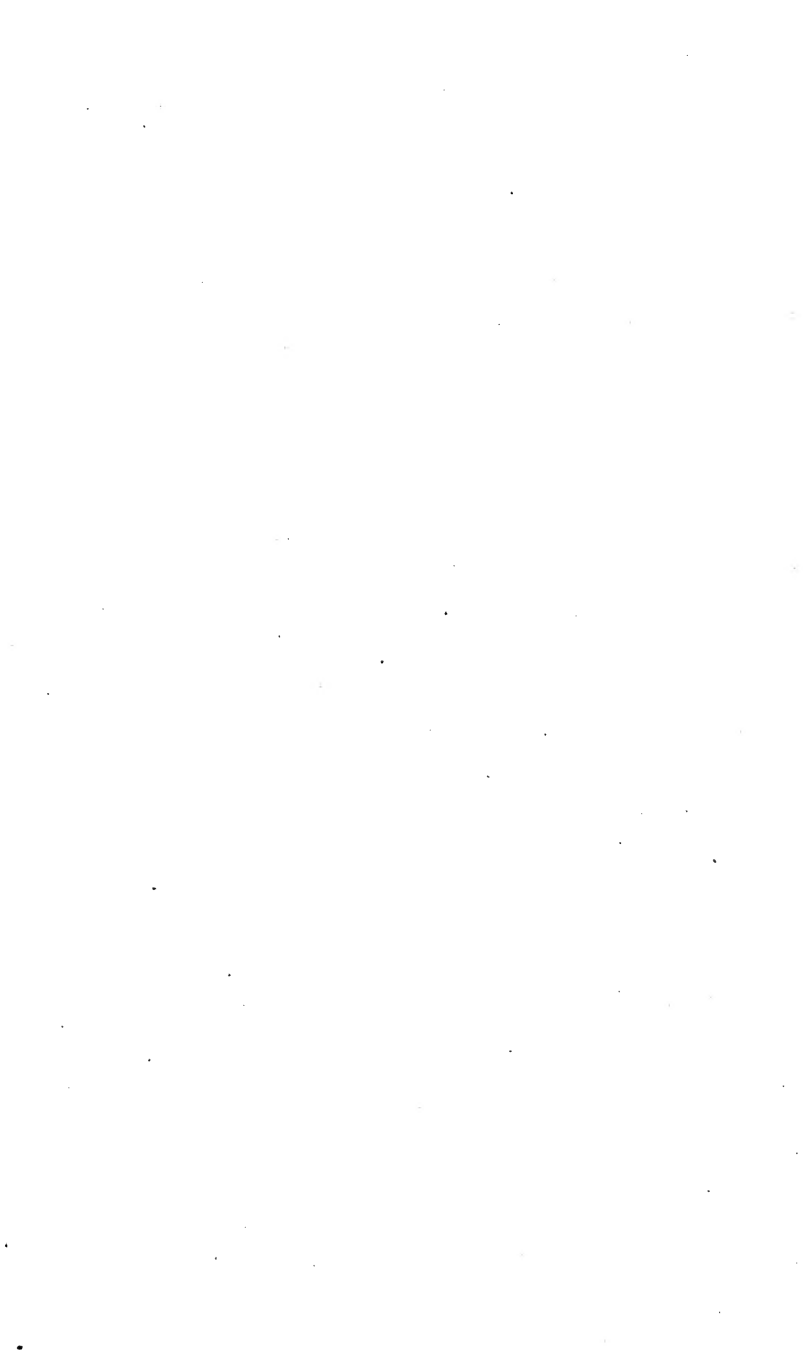
The liquor in him was acting so strangely. One minute he would grow warm and tingling and would smile and smile into the dull glow of the dying fire. The next minute something in him would drop, he would sink down and down—icy cold, and shake until his teeth chattered. But he fought down the wild shriek that was in him.

When old Fritz came out in his long quaint nightrobe, Jim heard nothing till a hand slowly pressed his hot forehead.

And then he leaped up, snarled, stumbled out into the entry and down the steep stairs, falling,



"Dago Joe's big dull eyes looked straight at the proprietor.



rising, stumbling. He reached the cold bracing air, breathed hard and deep, got his bearings and walked off fast, gripping his feelings.

He slept the rest of the night and half the next day in one of his old-time newsboy holes under a sidewalk.

Then he went to the proprietor, who talked hard, and Jim felt stronger as he listened. He was shown how to use the "dope"—the throat medicine. He did not sing that night nor the next, but the proprietor kept him in the cafe and let him sleep in a bedroom upstairs.

He saw nothing of Fritz, for Fritz kept back in the orchestra and seemed never to look Jim's way.

In a week the soreness was gone from his throat, and though it felt queer when he sang, still the sound seemed to come out all right, the people still applauded.

He missed Joe's wonderful chords; he sang now with the orchestra behind him. He felt the jealous Hungarians try to spoil his song by dragging; and with the old joy of fighting, he lifted them on, lifted till his voice felt the strain, then drank and lifted again. And still he won the applause.

The climax came on a balmy Saturday evening in June.

Miss Louise had come back to town over Sunday for a wedding, and she came down with a jolly crowd, who sat round the big center table.

Jim sat silent beside her, with so strange a look in his broad dark flushed face that she kept leaning over, her brown eyes softening, asking what was the trouble. But Jim would only smile up, and when his turn to sing came he would start nervously and climb up by the orchestra and sing the old songs, at first with little fire; but as he sang his voice warmed and the queer roughness was smoothed off; and the moment it was gone Jim seemed to change, his eyes flashed, his hands made the quick wonderful speaking Italian gestures that Joe had taught him, and his voice soared out as of old—glad and pure and thrilling.

But when he finished and sat down, soon one hand would creep to his throat; again the strange look. And this kept on till midnight.

He grew more nervous and unnatural, till his face was such a contrast to the others that Miss Louise cried impatiently:

"Why Jimmy you look like 'The Drunkard's Dream' itself! You *are* a queer one!"

She looked at him a moment—drinking in this unique phase of humanity.

“Jimmy, I wish I had a picture of you now—at this moment. You’re perfectly stunning—almost tragic!”

Jim’s eyes blazed.

“Won’t you ever quit laughin’?”

“Jimmy, I’d like to hear you sing ‘The Drunkard’s Dream.’ Will you—please?”

Jim sneered into her dazzling eyes and then swore an oath that made all the ladies shiver with delight. He sprang up by the orchestra, and as the soft low prelude began he turned sharply.

“Say,” he cried, hoarsely, “play it quicker!”

The Hungarians caught the look in his eyes, and the music grew fierce, impatient, wild.

And Jim sang.

Twice in the song he cleared his throat as though he would blow out the hoarseness. His hands were clinched behind him, his eyes gleamed like the eyes of an animal at bay, and his voice rushed on—mocking the sad words, mocking the music, mocking the gay flushed faces, mocking itself.

It was indeed almost tragic—“perfectly stunning!” And Miss Louise and her friends held



their breath, with a delicious feeling that something awful was to happen.

Old Fritz stopped playing and leaned 'way forward.

But Lucky Jim saw nothing. He hardly heard the words or the music. The room was a blurr of whirling lights. Deep in his throat that sore spot was quickly spreading. So the game was done! Suddenly his old dream swept over him dimly just for an instant—his song in the glorious big show—the song that might have been! He stopped short in “The Drunkard’s Dream” and laughed a crazy laugh, and then with a furious effort he cleared his throat and soared into the finale:

“I grab the bar tight!  
I feel I must fight!  
This curse inside me!  
Where can I—hide—me?  
With a big sad sob—I shout:  
I’m down——”

Up and up—recklessly—till he seized the high note!

And then his voice broke.

He felt himself sink into a chair. He felt the whole great gilded room silent and watching, and

this made him angry. He felt Miss Louise's soft hand on his shoulder, and this made him angry. He heard the proprietor's strong kindly encouraging voice in his ear, and this made him angrier still.

He felt his arm seized by a big quivering hand; he looked up and saw old Fritz, and then suddenly Jim's black curly head went down in his hands and shook. He felt ashamed and tried fiercely to steady down.

And while he tried he heard Fritz's voice speaking to all the people. Never had it sounded so strange and harsh:

"You haf raced a voice to death! You—you—all you! You race und fight—for money! You race—to eat und drink! You race—for somet'ing new! You grab dis voice! You lash! You put in your fire! So—So now you kill dis voice!"

His harsh tones sank to a whisper.

"Come, Jimmy. Yes—so—let me hold you—so. Ve go away—ve go und sleep."

Old Fritz led Jim slowly out the side door into the alley. Jim sank down in the dirt, and Fritz waited.

In the cafe was a long silence, then a buzz of excited voices; then again the orchestra starting a rag-time.

## CHAPTER VII

### WHAT HAPPENED TO THE RIP VAN WINKLE

**F**ROM the open cafe window a stream of light poured down on the short burly figure of Dago Joe. His eyes glittered. He shrank into a shadow.

As Jim and Fritz went slowly away he turned and followed them.

When he saw Fritz lead Jim into their tenement entry, he stopped outside for a long time. How carefully he was thinking.

At last he went in to the housekeeper's door, knocked and kicked furiously, spoke quickly and hurried away.

The woman came out, cross and heavy-eyed, in her nightdress; she looked up and down the dark hall, alarm and curiosity struggling with sleepiness; then she went back and dressed, and went up to Fritz's room.

"Who's dyin'?" she asked. "What can I do?"

Fritz was bending over Jim who lay back in the

big chair. He looked up, startled. Then he smiled:

"No Mrs. Schmidt ve are not dyin' yet."

"Well," cried the woman now thoroughly angry, "some one kicked on my door and called in that you people had some one dying and wanted me quick!"

"Nobody dyin' here," smiled Fritz. "But maybe dere ees somebody above or below. Here! I go mit you."

The housekeeper and old Fritz went from room to room. The big dark tenement was slowly roused from top to bottom. Window after window flared down into the street.

And when Joe waiting below saw this, he seemed satisfied, and hurried down the street.

\* \* \* \* \*

Fritz was still out of the room.

Suddenly Jim felt a delicious coolness on his head. It sank down into his mind, drowning the aches in a minute. He could feel her press lightly on the cool wet cloth; and with a deep shaking breath of relief he turned and saw her big blue eyes looking deep into his, as if she felt all the aches herself.

To Jim staring up she seemed suddenly older.

"Don't you dare to talk or even think," she whispered.

He reached up awkwardly and took her hand and pulled it slowly toward his cheek, and let go and felt ashamed of himself. He felt the hand quickly withdrawn, but after a long silence it came down again. And he felt a deep swift rush of feeling—a feeling entirely new.

But the hand only moved the cloth further down over his forehead, and he heard her move away.

He opened wide his eyes and stared into the coals. Once he heard her coming again and he shut his eyes and held his breath. But she changed her mind and went back.

Jim nestled down deeper; the delicious coolness sank down and down into his head, and he drifted up into darkness.

This darkness soon grew heavy and warm with throbs of rag-time music; he was in the "Rip" trying to sing. And so he struggled—drifting.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Hush!" It was Fritz's whisper. "Let him sleep—Gott in Himmel!"

Jim glanced quickly sideways and saw old Fritz leaning forward with an open letter and some

money in his hands. The little blue eyes twinkled with anguish; they were dumb, stunned, groping.

"Daddy, it's all because of Jim. It's all his fault!"

Gretchen fell forward sobbing, with her soft shining hair on Fritz's knees.

And at this Jim felt a dizzy rush of dread; he stiffened, opened his eyes, reached forward, seized the letter from the floor and read it.

Old Fritz had been discharged.

"All because of Jim." The thought rose and filled his dazed mind and burned in waves. Up and down, up and down. Slowly the old white head and the young one grew blurred; again they drifted away till their voices were only strained whispers; she kept sobbing and kissing Fritz's hands, and then she grew quiet—exhausted from excitement and lack of sleep; her cheek was pressed to Fritz's cheek, she only whispered softly now and then. And again Jim drifted into the darkness.

\* \* \* \* \*

The faint clang of a fire-gong rang in the distance and jerked swiftly nearer. It was coming right into the room! Jim bounded up—dizzy, and held with both hands to the mantel. The floor under him trembled. Clang, clang! Galloping

hoofs and rumbling wheels. He staggered to the window, where Gretchen was already leaning out.

Without knowing why, he suddenly put his arm around her and felt her trembling and drew her tight. More bells came clanging. Never before had he felt the horror of alarm as he felt it now in the trembling of her small shoulders.

A policeman was hurrying by below.

"Ask him," she whispered. Jim leaned out:

"Where is the fire?"

The policeman looked up impatiently.

"The Rip Van Winkle!" he shouted and hurried on.

They heard a sharp cry behind them. Old Fritz was struggling blindly with his overcoat. Gretchen ran to him and tried to hold him, but he shook her off, and as Jim started to go out with him, Fritz pointed to the big chair.

"Don't you move till I come back! Don't you!"

The door slammed.

Gretchen turned slowly and sank into the chair; the faint glow of the fire made her face look flushed—but still unreal.

Jim rubbed his eyes. Was everything a dream to-night? Was he himself real? He wondered more and more at himself as at another person. For

now he was leaning over holding one of her hands, and he heard himself whisper:

"You're all right Gretchen. Don't look that way! You're all right."

He sank down on the floor and drifted off, and came to with a start—and looked up and saw Gretchen still staring into the fire. But the horror was gone from her eyes, they hardly looked tired; they were serious, trying to think. How much older she seemed!

Again the hot heavy darkness.

\* \* \* \* \*

Loud knocks at the door. He heard Gretchen go out, and then low gruff voices rose louder and louder. Jim pulled himself up and went to the door and opened it. Two men stood by Gretchen.

"There he is!" cried one of them. The other man wore a shield under his coat. Jim drew back! The man only watched him.

"Were you discharged from the 'Rip' last night?"

Jim nodded.

"Do you know the 'Rip' was half burned down two hours ago?"

Jim nodded.

"How do you know it?"



Jim rubbed his eyes and understood, and his throat thickened. He told briefly how they had heard the gong, how he had called down to the policeman, and how Fritz had run off to the fire.

"And look here!" he ended eagerly, straining to sweep off the crime that was fastening on him, "Ask the housekeeper. She was here, she knows we were all home when it happened."

He started to run downstairs ahead, but the detective held him.

"No, I guess I'll see her first," the man said grimly. And to Jim the walk downstairs seemed hours.

The housekeeper was roused and told her story, and then the tenants were questioned, and at last the detective was satisfied and went away.

How lucky the housekeeper had been wakened that first time! It could not have been better if some one had planned it ahead.

## CHAPTER VIII

### LUCKY JIM IS BEWILDERED

**S**AY! I've got a job!"

With these words Jim burst into the room. It was eight o'clock the next morning. Gretchen was bending over Fritz who lay in the deep chair, and Fritz's face was so white that Jim stopped short. He pushed his cap back over his curly black hair and stood by the fire warming his hands, trying to keep silent. But when Fritz opened his weary eyes and smiled at him, then Jim eagerly burst out again:

"I've got a bully job! Hunted for it all day an' now I've got it! It's only four dollars a week but he says he'll raise me in a year. And he says if I do things right I can go 'way up and make all kinds of money. He says one man started like me at sixteen and now he's a millionaire! I'm to begin at six-thirty to-morrow!"

Old Fritz leaned back and laughed. He laughed at first with plain heartless mirth, then with the

tenderest look in his eyes as he gazed at Jim; and then, as though Jim had made him think of something he feared, he drew Gretchen suddenly tight, and laughed in unsteady bursts, which grew lower and weaker; he squeezed Gretchen's arm till the veins on the back of his old hand stood out blue and crooked, and he stared silently into the fire.

Jim looked at Gretchen. Poor old Fritz—how sick he was!

Gretchen's big eyes were terribly anxious. But as Jim looked he saw, with a sudden shock, that she was anxious too for him. The longer she watched the worse grew her eyes—till Jim cleared his throat desperately and looked down at his feet.

"You"—her voice was very low—"you look sick too. What have you been doing? Where have you been?"

Jim looked at her in amazement. Was everybody crazy? What business was it of hers? Then he began to *feel* sick. He walked suddenly into his room and slammed the door.

What a fool she was! Sick? Cold? He never felt warmer in his life; he was burning hot; he could feel it on his cheeks. Softly he swore under his breath, till he heard old Fritz's voice:

"Jimmy!"

"Well?"

"I'm sorry I laugh already. I'm sick. Dot's why."

So Fritz at least wasn't crazy. If that infernal girl would only get out.

"Say Jimmy. So you begin work to-morrow. Vell, vot work?"

A silence.

"Livery stable."

Jim stopped short, for he thought he heard the beginning of another laugh. But the other room was silent. Only a sudden explosive breath from Fritz as though he were suffering. And then his cheery old voice:

"Vell?"

"I'm the man that feeds the horses. There's one black horse, and she's a beauty. You ought to see her eyes! She used to be on the track!"

Jim came back to the fire.

"Vot you feed her?"

Jim thought hard a minute.

"Well, you see I've only just begun the business."

He saw Gretchen watching proudly.

"Why," he burst out, "corn and hay and—sometimes oats and—meat sometimes!"

He thought he heard the laugh again and glared

round, but Fritz's face was only weak and tense, with eyes closed and hands gripping the sides of the chair.

"Vell," whispered Fritz, "vot—vot else?"

"Water! Pails of it—about—three pails—the minute she gets into the stable."

"Won't she," it was Gretchen, "won't she—kick you?"

"Yes," said Jim sharply. "Of course she'll kick. You ought to see her eyes. Why, you can read in the paper any day about fellers *killed* by horses." Then as he saw her eyes grow round, he added in a kinder tone: "But she won't kick me. You see I know something already about horses; I've seen 'em on the track, and the Skinner knows all about 'em, and he'll tell me. Besides, I feel like I knew this black horse already."

"Goot! Fine!" cried old Fritz. "Say Jimmy, you must get odder clothes."

Jim suddenly looked down at his velvet cafe uniform. That was why the livery man had grinned! He blushed.

"Yes," he said quickly, "I'll get some clothes. I won't have time to-morrow, so I'll go now."

He started for the door.

A hand touched his arm.

"Jimmy!" She was there again—looking up as though she were his mother. "You look sick. Yes, you do—please!"

With a strange bewildered sheepish feeling making slush of his mind and heart and soul, Lucky Jim turned slowly and sat down. He started up impatiently, but sank again. The chills began creeping all over him.

"Yes, you *are* sick!" Her voice rose in alarm. She made him go to bed, actually put him to bed in spite of his indignant protests; she hurried out and brought some hot soup and made him drink it, gave him medicine, made him delicious crisp toast, laughed, hummed old songs, kissed Fritz in the other room, brought Jim a hot bottle wrapped in a towel to warm his feet, laughed when he growled at this, felt his head and brought a cool cloth and pressed it over. And all this was done with bewildering swiftness and softness—not a sound but low laughs and humming. Jim objected to each successive thing, and then smiled with relief and comfort the minute it was done. And when it was over he simply lay back with eyes closed, and felt her hands press down the cloth, and heard her go away.

"Crazy!" he thought. "All crazy!"

The chills crept up and down, his bones ached, he could feel his head burn into the cool cloth till it grew hot too. Yes he was sick—but only as he had been many times before in the old street life. He remembered one time when he was only a kid. The night watchman of a certain big newspaper building had warned the gang to keep away, and they had laughed; and then one night the man had turned a hose in under the steps where they slept. How sick he had been the next day. He had sneaked into a dark warm basement and crept under a bench and lain there in a pile of rags, with the chills and burnings all day and night.

Yes a girl was certainly all right—when a fellow was sick. He heard her in the next room doing all these things to Fritz and kissing him besides—over and over. Thank God he wasn't Fritz!

"Vell! Now fix Jimmy!" At Fritz's voice, Jim started as though caught in something, and his cheeks grew ten times hotter.

She felt his cheeks.

"Oh!" Her voice was so anxious that Jim opened his eyes.

"Say, what's the matter with you?" he asked, sharply.

She only looked down. Then she leaned down.

"Jimmy," she whispered, "don't you dare to talk again!" And after that she began doing things all over again.

"Vell," called old Fritz weakly, "how you like our fine old nurse?"

"She's all right," said Jim, grudgingly. Silence. More fixing.

"Say," called Fritz, "how sick *are* you?"

"I ain't sick," said Jim, feebly.

"He is!" said Gretchen. Jim shut his eyes.

"Say," called Fritz, "you shoost stay in bed tomorrow. Dot horse can live anudder day alreatty, widout meat."

"No," said Jim decidedly, "I've got to be there at six-thirty."

"You don't," said Gretchen.

Jim slowly opened his eyes—and closed them very quickly.

"You can't," she added.

Jim gripped himself like a man, but kept his eyes shut tight.

"I will!" he said, firmly. "I've got to or I lose my job. Hold on now! Let *me* talk!"

His voice rose, talking to Fritz.

"I've got to keep that job. I tried eighteen oth places before I got this one. If I don't keep



where will we be? I tell you we've got mighty little money. I've only forty-eight dollars saved and that won't last. We've got to pay the rent next week, and coal and grub and—and things for you if you stay sick. I tell you I've thought it all out. I can't lose a day! Ain't that right?"

He sat up hot and stiff, listening.

At last the silence in the other room was broken by a deep quivering sound that made Jim leap out of bed and go to the door.

Old Fritz sat shaking in the big chair; from his eyes the tears rolled down his cheeks; and those quivering sounds kept coming, while Gretchen kissed him over and over, though her face was almost as bad as his.

"Say," said Jim, sharply but very low, "ain't that right?"

"No, no!" Fritz reached out his hand. "Jimmy, come here!"

And the minute Jim took that hand it closed on his so tight that Jim sank down to his knees, half choking.

"Jimmy you must go away; it vill neffer do! Ve pull you down too! I know I can't make no money more. Go, Jimmy, go!"

"No I won't go!"

Jim felt his very soul shake inside of him.

"You fixed me up when I was in saloons, you did—you know you did. You fixed my voice. You gave me this place and showed me this kind of livin' and you didn't swear at me when I was a fool in the 'Rip'—you just waited till I could see it myself. And then you lost your job on account of me. And I want to stay here always and help you. I'll get rich and give it all to you and her—that's all I want—I want to stay. And you ain't got any right to fire me. So I'll stay. An' that's all there is to it!"

He rose and turned his back and indignantly wiped his eyes.

"He *will* stay!" cried Gretchen, and now even her voice was shaky. "You can't stop him! He'll do anything he wants to! He will! And daddy, his voice isn't gone. Dear daddy say it isn't! And you can help him save it. So he'll do you good and you'll do him good. So let him, daddy." The voice sank and was muffled in kisses. "Daddy—daddy, don't feel so—don't you dare to. We'll be so strong again and happy. So you *will* let him? You must, daddy, because he will anyway—he'll do anything he wants to."

Another silence, till Jim felt Fritz's hand pulling

him back—closer and closer. Fritz was hugging him, and he was hugging Fritz. Crazy—all crazy! And at last Fritz tried to speak and missed it, and tried again, and then cried:

“I *vill*—I shoost *vill* talk!” And he gripped Jim’s hand and shouted: “Jimmy, you vill stay here all your life alreatty!”

\* \* \* \* \*

Slowly Jim cuddled in under the clothes, feeling very faint and giddy. In the other room he could hear the low drowsy hum of her voice, singing an old German sleep-song. This made Jim drowsier and drowsier.

He was almost asleep himself when he felt her press a delicious fresh cloth on his head. She kept pressing, but so very softly; then just the tips of her fingers crept down his cheeks; her fragrant breath was closer and closer. Up and up he drifted. She seemed at the same time very close and far away.

And then he heard her whisper:

“You must sleep all to-morrow—just sleep—sleep—just sleep. You will, won’t you, please?”

How much older she seemed.

Jim smiled and went on drifting. The chills kept pulling him back, but at this he only smiled

again. He smiled at the whole world, at old Fritz, at himself most of all.

At last he heard her rise. Swish, swish, swish, went her dress. And the door was gently closed.

Jim opened his eyes and stared a moment wonderingly up at the ceiling.

"Crazy—all crazy!"

## CHAPTER IX

### TWO PEOPLE GROW OLDER

**I**N the next three years Jim held resolutely to his work in the stable.

He made endless mistakes, broke a good many things, and had sudden fits of anger ; but after each trouble he was heartily sorry and worked so late at night to make up for it that his wages were raised to five, then to six and at last to eight dollars a week.

He was passionately fond of horses. Most of his mistakes lay in trying to do new things for them. The great race horse grew to know Jim's weakness, and whinnied all kinds of tid-bits out of him, for when she arched her slender neck and poked her nose into his hand and looked down at him, Jim could refuse her nothing. He used to neglect his other work dreaming over her old triumphs on the track ; he eagerly learned her whole glorious record, and he was forever bothering coachmen to find some wonderful medicine that might still cure her stiffness.

"That boy," said a kind old Danish coachman who knew Jim's story, "he loves the mare because he's a thoroughbred racer himself. He's off the track and so is she. And she knows it as well as he does, an' that's why she's been so gentle ever since he came. Helpin' each other bear it—yes, sir!"

At last, when Jim was eighteen, he was allowed to drive her—in a spick-and-span hansom cab. That was a proud time. His wages were raised to ten dollars a week, the open air made him glow all over with health, and the mare seemed to feel his hand and steady down. So they both worked on, shying and snorting at common-day life, dreaming old dreams, but doing the day's work.

Till one sparkling frosty morning a fire engine dashed by the edge of the park, and then the mare simply couldn't stand it. She bent her beautiful head and stretched and doubled, the cab tipped and plunged, and Jim, guiding her down the broad park road round curves and past blatant automobiles, lost his first thrill of fear, forgot the shouting police, the shrieking ladies and even the two delighted college sports inside the cab; and as that splendid animal went wild with the joy of racing, Jim leaned 'way over the cab.

"Go on—go on—go on!" he was shouting.

And the next thing he knew he lay in the snow, the cab lay on its side and the great mare stood frothy and quivering between two policemen.

"Is she hurt?" he cried jumping up.

No but terribly shaken. And so was Jim—in body and spirit.

That night he went off with his old friend the Skinner and drank hard and had a long night over the dice, and lost a week's wages.

And then he came home at dawn and found Gretchen waiting.

"Hush! Don't let daddy hear," was all she said. But Jim saw the look in her eyes for days and days, and this kept him straight for months after.

He spent most of his evenings at home.

Old Fritz, though much feebler now, was still as gay in the evenings. He was giving violin lessons again—two or three a day in his room, and at night he would sit in the big leather chair with his fiddle, and play the tenderest quietest happiest songs, while Gretchen played beside him.

Jim watched her.

She was just made for accompaniments.

Dago Joe's chords had been loud, jerky, strange and sad, like music struggling in the dark; hers were slower, tenderer, stronger—twining round the

song of the fiddle as though forever protecting and filling it with life.

Now and then she would hum a low sweet second, smiling round at the bent white head, her eyes shining.

How much older she was. Jim wondered vaguely what had done it. Why, old Fritz of course; his long sickness, the anxiety, the night watching, the hard work she did for Miss Louise and her friends, for she was always sewing. Just about a woman now—eighteen, but a good deal older.

What lights came into her eyes, and how rich was her voice, with a hundred new shades of feeling in it—still new ones when you thought you knew them all. How soft and brown was her hair. She fixed it in that same queer big German ring, because Fritz liked it so. She wore a loose white dress, like what Miss Louise used to wear—only without all the fool extra things.

Just about a woman.

Then her eyes would meet his, and at once she would look away at Fritz, and so would Jim, while old Fritz saw nothing, didn't even notice the break in her playing, but fiddled on softly, staring into the fire.



She was a queer girl. Jim couldn't make her out.

Sometimes for days she ignored him and was wonderfully loving to Fritz. Again she sat for hours, sewing very slowly and then very fast, stopping to gaze out of the window, and then beginning all over again. A most disturbing silence.

And when she did speak it was often worse, especially if old Fritz was out of the room. A deep and solemn tone was underneath all she said, try as she would to force the old laughs and jokes. She was too simple to fool anybody. Jim liked this very simplicity. He felt himself drifting 'way up into glad voiceless songs that rose higher and higher.

This vague delicious artistic drifting of Jim's she would break by the queerest questions, put in such a quiet casual way. She would ask about the very worst things in his past life, things he knew would shock her, but when he put her off she would fall silent, and some day she would come quietly back to the same question. And when at last he had blurted it all out—the gambling, fighting, drinking, then she would ask more questions; and as Jim answered these he would feel himself being excused and pitied and justified in a most bewildering fashion—until he broke out indignantly:

"No, that *wasn't* why! I did it just because I had it in me!"

Then she would give him a look that sent the shivers up and down his back, and would go on sewing and thinking.

She seemed forever wondering about women he had met or might have met; he could vaguely feel her asking questions all around this subject. Mamie the Bum, Boston Sarah and Spanish Elsie were taken up one by one, in spite of the deep shocks she received in the process; and then the younger more respectable "lady friends" who had graced the gang's picnics and dances, until at last it was absolutely certain that Lucky Jim had despised all women and girls and had cared only for gambling. And at this she actually started to justify gambling—a little, but stopped herself sternly.

One night he found her very silent. Only now and then she roused into sudden tenderness for Fritz, and when Jim tried to join in she cast on him the most indignant glances. What had he done? He puzzled in vain.

When old Fritz went to bed she sat by the lamp, sewing hard. At last she told him, in short abrupt sentences, of the song recital she had heard at Miss Louise's big house. A handsome baritone had sung;

he had sung such wonderful dreamy things that, as she listened bending over the stairs, she had dreamed of her whole life ahead—and of Jim's life, and everything in the world seemed so beautiful. It seemed a pity to her that the minute the singer had finished, all those women got around him, petting him in a way that was simply sickening. Spoiling him! You could see that by the silly way he smiled.

A long silence. Jim tried to look interested.

"Jimmy."

"All right. Go ahead."

"Will you sing in opera or in big concerts, or—in little recitals—or how?"

"Opera," said Jim, promptly. "I don't want any women too close. I want 'em 'way down in the dark."

"Jimmy!" What furious delighted sewing.

"Why don't you want them near you?"

"Because I don't. None of 'em. Except—well, I don't know."

He stopped and watched her sew. How much older now! The sewing went even faster, but as the minutes went on this grew slower.

"Jimmy."

Another silence.

"All right. Go ahead."

"You ought to like them."

"Like who?"

"Those women. You needn't like them too much. But be just plain friends with them. You see, at first they can help you. Yes they can. Miss Louise knows all about it. She says they can boost you 'way up—twice as quick as any one else can."

"Yes," said Jim, angrily, "they did boost me in the 'Rip'; they boosted so hard I nearly spoiled my voice. How do I know it's ever coming back again?"

"Oh, Jimmy!" Never had he heard a voice so absolutely sure of something. "Just wait till my plan is ready to tell you."

So he felt that slow process go on through the months, encircling his past, present and future. So he grew to see why she asked her queer questions. So he thought of her more and more, fiercely, impatiently, through sleepless nights, through hours of work in the stable.

Until one night he made a tremendous discovery.

The Skinner burst into the stable and told of a wonderful job he could get for Jim in Wall Street the next morning.

"Only office boy, but there ain't any end to the chances. I tell you, Lucky, the old street's a big shake-up—at lunch you're a cheap skate eatin' off the hot-dog wagon; at supper you're a Delmonico-Waldorf-automobile millionaire! There's no jump so big that some fellow won't take it. And you—what are you here? Private secretary to a horse—that's you. Now cut it, Lucky—say you'll come."

Jim eyed the Skinner's gray Derby hat and big checked suit, the gay lilac handkerchief and polished shoes—and he grinned, simply with the pleasure of dreaming about it.

"Well," cried the Skinner, delighted, "then you're comin'?"

"No," said Jim, still smiling, but now in an entirely different dream, which the Skinner noticed. He watched Jim hard and grew thoroughly exasperated.

"Lucky," he sneered, "do you remember the time Dopy Ed had a girl? What a grinning shivering fool he made of himself! Well, Lucky Jim, that's you now. Spoiled! Absolutely melted for life!" The Skinner's voice dropped in disgust. "An' all because of a long-haired, cooing, giggling——"

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That night Jim limped in with lips all swollen

and plaster over his broad right cheek-bone. And when Gretchen started up Jim only growled:

"Once upon a time the Skinner had three teeth," and slunk into his bedroom.

When later she came in to ask if he didn't want supper, he growled in still fiercer tones:

"No! I want to be with myself!"

And so he was all night.

Were all these glorious driftings and pictures and songs 'way inside of him—all to be brought down to just this common every-day thing—"having a girl?"

With uneasiness and then with a deep shiver he saw as he drifted that inextricably woven into every song and dream and picture were the voice, the low laugh and the lights in the big blue eyes of Gretchen! His whole life was gathering round her so fast he couldn't think clearly, but only feel. Along came his voice, or hopes of a voice, with its radiant cloud of future triumphs, rose balconies, deep rich orchestra chords, breathless silence, deafening bravos of applause—all for Gretchen! What pride would shine in her big quiet eyes! What joy in her low voice! What—kisses!

Jim sat up suddenly in the dark, and then sank down.

That was why he had watched her lips till he knew every twitch, every smile, every tired droop, every angry pout. Why had he warmed to old Fritz and wanted to work for him, die for him—why? Because Fritz was the father of Gretchen!

Gretchen! The whole world growing bright round her eyes, singing glad songs round her voice, the whole world dropping off into space, and just leaving to Jim alone—in his arms, laughing, trembling, breathing, kissing—Gretchen!

Jim laughed, leaped up and stared out of the window, breathed in big cold fresh breaths, broke training and stole one of Fritz's cigars, puffed and stared into the gray and red embers of that eternally observing old fire, calmed down and softened as he smoked, stopped laughing those strange, uncertain laughs, and felt ten years older.

“Having a girl.”

What a poor ignorant fool was the Skinner.

## CHAPTER X

### A SHADOW CREEPS OVER THE DREAM OF GRETCHEN

**W**HY hello, Joe!" cried Jim suddenly, turning from the big race horse, curry-comb in hand. "Where've you been lately?"

It was two weeks after Jim's great discovery. He had worked twice as hard since then, and was now still at it late in the evening, when Dago Joe, burly and dirty as of old, slouched into the stall.

Often in the last three years Joe had appeared in just this way—silent, watching Jim with a peculiarly anxious look. Only now and then he would come closer and growl:

"Say, is your throat sore any at all? De boss, he make you drive out late for swell dances? Say! Don't you do it! You want no coughs!"

And a year ago he had begun asking:

"De voice—you feel him yet?"

But now for some months he had not come at all.

"Where've you been?" asked Jim.

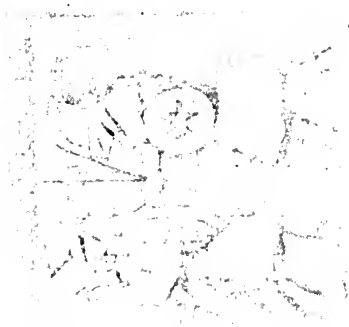
Joe seized Jim's arm.



"You come!" he cried, eagerly. "I show where I been!"

An hour later Joe and Jim stood squeezed behind a narrow wing on the stage of a tiny Italian theatre. It was over a saloon, just a long narrow room, the rear benches rising close to the ceiling. The benches were packed with peddlers, bootblacks and ditch-diggers; rows of big swarthy faces, red handkerchiefs, thick necks, and black tumbled hair over gleaming eyes. All gazing up at the fiery "Romance of Roland." This romance had hundreds of acts, continuing night after night for five months; each act was full of gay ladies and knights, of terrible fights and gallant love speeches. Knights and ladies were only big puppets of tin and tinsel, but to these ragged Italians it all seemed quite as real as American ditches and freezing snow blizzards, as padrones and political bosses.

As in a dream, Jim stared down at the rapt silent faces. Close above him three half-naked men leaned from a loft, fiercely working the strings and rods that made brave knights swagger and clash swords, or gay ladies bow and applaud. What magnificent muscles jumped and quivered in the arms and chests and shoulders of these three naked men! How deep and rich was the voice of the old



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white-haired Italian who stood behind the opposite wing and recited all those musical flowing speeches—in verse, all learned by heart from the libretto—and different verses each night! What a voice! What a dream!

"I been here," Joe whispered.

At midnight, when all had gone, Jim saw the old Italian smile kindly at Joe and nod assent, and the one gaslight over the piano was left flaring.

Joe sat down and crashed out a few chords.

"Now sing!" he cried.

Jim thought of Fritz and hesitated.

"It's too soon," he said. "And if I once begin I can't ever stop."

Joe shrugged his enormous shoulders.

"You save de voice too much!" he growled.

He told how he had worked night after night for two years at this same piano, and what wonderful chords the old Italian had taught him.

"I look here at de Roland, I hear de old man's voice, I watch de peoples listen, I feel, I feel so hard it go now in my music. For you—I learn all for you. Sing! You save de voice to hell! Sing!"

And Jim climbed up on the little low stage and sang.

How different from the first night of their dream

six years ago. Men now—one tall, clean, strong and matured by hard out-of-door work; the other burly, shaggy, foul. But what true fire of music was in those coarse crashing chords!

Jim's voice came out, rough and new and uncertain, but now and then so rich that Joe stopped playing and stared off into the darkness, as though seeing radiant pictures, until Jim finished.

"Say!" Joe's voice was low and shook a little. "We been togedder long time. You sing—I play. You wanta me—keep on—now—wid you?"

Jim jumped down and gripped both Joe's hands. And that settled it. Joe shook all over and then grew wild and fierce as of old and cried:

"Come on, sing! We singa all de night!"

But Jim was not all the old Jim. He refused. Joe swore, and then admitted Jim was right and left him and went off and drank himself deep down into dark grimy visions of beauty.

There came other nights. But in between came home evenings with Gretchen, and at last Jim told her. They had a long talk with Fritz, and the end of it was that Jim promised to stop singing for the present.

Gretchen had long thinking spells which resulted in a deep curiosity to see this Joe.

For some time Jim objected, feeling that here was the one and only thing that could ever make trouble. But of course he gave in.

And when Joe came, Gretchen liked him. She pitied him for being so coarse and big and dirty, she read at once the devotion for Jim in his eyes, and she took him into her world as she would have taken a clumsy Newfoundland dog. She asked him many questions about the old life, most of them about Jim, but a few about Joe himself—half fearful questions, as though she remembered something which fascinated and yet frightened her; questions about the “Rip” and the jovial proprietor.

But Joe flamed up only a very little, and even this he fought down as though he too were afraid of something; he grew more afraid and silent when she asked him how he earned his living. He made only short low answers, which she vaguely felt were lies.

And yet she liked him, and Joe began to come often.

To her Joe embodied the last of Jim’s old street life, dark and foul and mysterious, but now dumb and powerless to harm. This last black shadow creeping out of the past only brightened by vivid contrast the future.

For as Gretchen sewed she was making the most minute careful plans for Jim's voice.

Of these plans, Miss Louise was always the bright gracious angel.

All through the summer, for two days and a night each week, Gretchen went out to sew at the big summer home of Miss Louise's father. It was set high on a rocky hill over the Sound—a wonderful place for dreaming.

The huge old trees with low branches, the velvety lawn below, the meadows behind, the barns and the dairy, the cows and chickens and hounds; in the house the rich low rooms and halls, the old carved chairs, the dark portraits, the gold and the silver; and then the night, with the birds drowsily peeping just outside her window, the tide rippling and lapping far below, the old frogs croaking in the inlet, the katydids, the tiny lamps of the fire-flies; and high over all the twinkling silent old stars.

Here she sewed and planned and dreamed of Jim and his voice, and of Miss Louise—who could raise him up and make him famous!

Back at home she kept these wonderful plans all secret. But the beauties of stars and flowers and waves, and the fabulous treasures of the house—

all these she described often to Fritz and Jim—and to Joe too because she pitied him.

At such times, as Joe listened, his swarthy face showed a strange hesitation, a deep fierce struggle within. Often he broke away while she talked and went out, slamming the door.

But again he would listen eagerly and would ask the strangest questions.

\* \* \* \* \*

At last, sewing with Miss Louise out under the big trees one lazy day in September, Gretchen spoke again of Jim; and then as Miss Louise grew interested and tactfully drew her on, she eagerly told it all—her old terror of the street, how its hold on Jim had slowly weakened and how hard he had worked in the stables to save up money for lessons.

“I suppose,” she said, timidly, “a voice needs hundreds and hundreds of lessons before it can sing in the opera.”

Miss Louise gave a quick laugh—which stopped short as she saw the alarm in Gretchen’s round serious eyes.

“Yes,” she said, gently. “But what are *thousands* of lessons when at last you can sing like that?”

She looked at Gretchen thoughtfully.



"Your good old father," she said at last, "does *he* think Jim's voice is so fine?"

Gretchen dropped her sewing.

"So fine!" she cried. "He thinks that if the man's voice will only be splendid as the boy's voice was—then it *must* go up—'way, 'way up! And daddy—he knows. He said just the same thing of a voice twelve years ago; he saved it out of the Bowery saloons and trained it a little and sent it home to Berlin—and now it is famous—famous all over Germany!"

"How exciting!"

Miss Louise leaned forward and her brown eyes sparkled.

"You must bring Jim to me," she added, "and then we'll—oh, we'll do everything for him!"

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Long after midnight Gretchen still leaned from her window, watching the stars that were silent—like Jim's future.

Silent—but when so dazzling as now?

\* \* \* \* \*

A sudden growl, a scuffle. One of the big hounds had leaped from his kennel and was growling furiously.

Directly below Gretchen's window a tiny light

flashed and went out. She heard quick steps, and a short black mass of something shot off into the shadows down toward the beach.

Gretchen leaned far out—rigid, breathless, listening.

The big hound was slowly circling the house, his head 'way down, uttering from time to time a wild low whine. The night gave it a peculiar terror. Round and round it went—pitiless, eager, blind—like vengeance that never is slaked.

Gretchen stared, as in a spell, long after the whines had died down. Then she crept back into bed—trembling, her dream blackened by a creeping shadow of something.

She sat up in the darkness.

“What is coming?” she whispered.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE STREET REACHES UP

**T**HREE nights later Gretchen was back in the little old room, sewing by the fire, while Fritz sat polishing the back of his fiddle. Jim was still away at his work. The night was black and thick—swept by the gusts of an equinoctial gale.

The door burst open.

Dago Joe—dripping wet, white-faced and savage, glared in out of the dark. His chest was heaving.

“Go!” he cried, hoarsely. “Go quick! De Tombs! Jim—in de Tombs!”

Fritz rose, very slowly.

Joe seized the old man’s quivering arm.

“Listen!”

His voice sank to a low thick whisper:

“You an’ her—you don’t be scare! Jim can prove he was not there! He safe! You don’t be scare!”

He turned and went quickly out.

The door slammed.

Old Fritz stood still motionless, listening to the gusts of wind and rain on the windows. He seemed hardly to breathe.

"Come, daddy, come." Gretchen's voice was quiet.

\* \* \* \* \*

Two days afterward, early in the morning, she sat leaning forward, her sewing in her lap, staring into the fire. The confusion and shame and fear were all gone. She could think clearly.

Miss Louise's big country house had been robbed. Jim had been suspected, and for two days and a night he had been in jail. Then it had been proved by the boss of the stables that Jim had been there until ten o'clock on the night of the burglary. Old Fritz and Gretchen had proved he had reached home at half-past ten and had been there all night; in this they were supported by the housekeeper and other tenants; and later came other friends of Jim to show just where he had been for two days before the burglary. The alibi was complete. It seemed almost as though some one had planned it ahead.

But most of all, innocent old Fritz and Gretchen had talked in a way that at last convinced even the

detectives. And when the real criminals were caught and it was found that Jim had never known them, then at last he had been released, and now he was back at his work in the stables.

And Gretchen sat thinking.

She felt it now with a sharp thrill of pain. Joe's wild wet savage face, the defiance and despair in his bloodshot eyes, and then the Tombs and the long dark rows of cells—all this, in the strain of the moment, she had barely seen; her only thought had been to tell all the truth about Jim to save him. But now when it was over she saw it all vividly.

The black shadow of the street creeping up again over his life. Only for a moment. But would it come again?

She drew a quivering breath and took up her sewing. She looked at it a moment, then it dropped to the floor.

The sewing was for Miss Louise. Miss Louise had suspected Jim of being a thief! She had told the detectives how well Gretchen knew the house and how badly Jim needed money. She had told them how innocent Gretchen must be, but how Jim had been bred in the street, how he might have listened to Gretchen's accounts and yielded and put

his old gang on the scent. She had told them that and had let Jim stay two days in jail!

Gretchen gave a sudden bitter laugh and sprang up, and then sank down, with her head in her hands, sobbing. The sobs grew more and more violent, but at last they died away, and again, with her chin in her hands, she leaned over gazing into the coals.

How much older she looked, and how quiet.

No more work for Miss Louise. No more eager talks. No more dazzling dreams in the starlight.

Gretchen rose, put on her hat and cloak, and went out.

\* \* \* \* \*

She must have other work at once, for Fritz was earning now but a few dollars a week.

She applied at a score of places in vain; her confidence and her new oldness began to leave her; she felt weak and frightened, but all this she kept to herself.

In the evenings she tried to laugh and talk and play to old Fritz's fiddle. All night she lay tossing and planning the next day's search.

And then, three weeks later, after walking all afternoon from shop to shop through a cold Oc-

tober rain, at night she had shooting pains in her chest; in alarm old Fritz called a doctor; and the doctor pronounced it pneumonia.

Fritz's fright was pitiful. Although he had only sixty dollars saved, he would have none of the free infirmary doctor, but got the very best one he could find; and went on and bought every medicine the doctor could think of. Not only that, but when the doctor proposed a hospital, Fritz listened to Gretchen who begged him to keep her at home, and he spent more money to make a hospital out of the sitting-room.

So his money was gone in a week, when Gretchen was just in the crisis.

He mortgaged the piano, but that money lasted only three days; he borrowed all that Jim had, but in a week this too was almost gone. And then Fritz began speaking of pawning his fiddle.

Late that night, having made old Fritz go to bed, Jim sat watching Gretchen. For two weeks he had left his stable work and had watched her with hardly a break. Now the pain and delirium were gone. She lay haggard and white, with her eyes closed.

Jim kept looking at the fiddle.

Each time he looked, his face grew more tense,

his eyes more bright. At last he rose noiselessly, put on his hat and coat, took the fiddle out and left it on the landing. He came back and wakened Fritz to watch in his place, and then with a hastily muttered excuse he hurried away.

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The next evening Gretchen roused with a start.

Old Fritz, his face white, stood staring at Jim and gripping him by the arm.

Jim seemed to notice nothing. His eyes flashed with a light she had never seen before, and his voice was low but fast and shaking, as though his nerves were all running away.—

“I tell you I only borrowed your fiddle!” he cried again and again. “You were going to pawn it anyhow!”

Gretchen was wide awake now.

“What good to her—your thirty-one dollars? We needed three hundred to save her! So I went to the Skinner—and the Skinner he knew—knew the horse, I tell you—knew how the race had been fixed—and ‘Leading Lady’ was booked sure to win! Well—then I lost my nerve—it was Gretchen’s life—but the Skinner he made me! I put it all up on ‘Leading Lady’ at ten to one—thirty-one dollars to lose—three hundred and ten to win!”



Now he was crouching down, red and unreal in the dull glow from the fire, hands clinched before him, breath quick and hard, eyes dilated—blazing. Lucky Jim the Gambler!

“The horses got off the first start—‘Leading Lady’ behind on the inside—I swore at her jockey—he rode like a fool—the Skinner just laughed—there she was—the second time around—*two lengths* behind! *Two lengths*—you don’t know what it means! My head got red inside—I felt the Skinner grab my head! ‘Look!’ he yelled. ‘Look at her! Look!’ And I—saw her come! Down the home-stretch—one length behind! Come on—come on—come on! We jumped up on the bench! Half a length—a quarter—a neck—a nose! They were by! The Skinner grabbed me! Held me ‘way over his head! I looked—and ‘Leading Lady’—had won!—won! And Gretchen——”

His glance met hers.

She closed her eyes quickly; she heard him spring toward her—and shuddered. She heard Fritz stop him; she looked up again and Fritz was holding him back; Jim was leaning toward her, and his eyes—his eyes! She shut hers again and drifted up, faint and giddy and throbbing.

"Jimmy!"

Fritz's old voice was so stern and harsh that she stopped in her dream and listened. It sounded far below.

"Jimmy!" Now she was drifting down toward it.

"Jimmy!" She looked and saw Fritz holding Jim's eyes with his. And the gaze of old Fritz was terribly real, so real she could see Jim too come out of *his* dream and back to her life, his eyes softening with shame, his muscles slowly relaxing. How weak and shaken he looked!

"Not to-night! You are not—enough clean—even to take her hand—to-night!"

At this she suddenly reached out her hand, and before Fritz could stop him Jim had seized it—but he dropped it and turned away.

Fritz stood between them—bending close to her pillow.

She tried to speak, but could only whisper in his ear. Slowly Fritz turned and she heard him whisper to Jim.

"Go—she wishes—und ve dare not hurt her. Go!"

A long silence.

"Jimmy," she whispered.

In a moment he was bending over, and his eyes, so suddenly changed, told her all his deep shame and remorse.

"Never—never again! Never!" he whispered.

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She had long hours of deep delicious sleep.

Each day she awoke feeling fresher and stronger, the tide of new strength seemed just to rise in her mind and her heart, and go creeping out all through her limbs, till she wanted to rise, but they wouldn't let her.

Jim was so silent and humble. Vaguely she felt that all the bad part of Jim was a dream—back in the nights of delirium.

He was away now all day long. Was it his old stable work or was it something new? She heard mysterious whispers and chuckles. What was it?

All the day long she lay thinking. Old Fritz sat close by, so anxious, so careful about every little medicine, the fire, and all the little delicacies he had bought. He was so happy having her all to himself; he told her so—laughing strangely; he told her it seemed like old days; he talked of the quaint carved house in Nuremburg, of her old games and corners and dolls and Christmas. And to Gretchen it felt like old nursery times, so quiet and peaceful

and safe; just to lie there and love him—and dream of Jim and the life ahead.

“How much older I am!” she kept thinking.

As the old man, with eyes shining, let his memory ramble back, slowly in Gretchen’s mind the nursery, the dolls, the goblins, the dreams and the kisses—all gathered around one sacred deep mysterious thing—motherhood.

Was it only because Fritz loved his wife so passionately that now she rose smiling in all the old pictures? Motherhood—can a *man* feel all its secrets? Can *he* ask questions like those that Gretchen asked Fritz? Foolish old Fritz—only a man, who thought he was remembering it all by himself, with only “mein baby” to help him. He never dreamed how he was just being led along by Gretchen’s questions, to help her as she dreamed and wondered, not alone of her mother’s joy and agony in love and birth and babyhood, not alone of the motherhood that *had* been, but of the motherhood that—she closed her eyes and drifted far into the future; drifted, almost afraid to think.

Fritz put it all to music. As he sat gazing at the pictures in the coals, he began to listen to the past. Old simple melodies, the first he had ever played; harshold scales and exercises that had made

his fingers ache; a little song he himself had composed and the great Schubert had praised; the voices of old comrades; jolly evenings in gardens, with the good beer foaming high and the big band making the whole world rock and swing to Strauss waltzes; then glorious concerts and operas, his own small triumphs, his hopes and ambitions—and through it all his wife's voice, forever hoping and lifting and loving.

"Ach!" he whispered, "dose songs ve togedder heard! Dose songs—dose songs."

And then he would take out his fiddle and hug it so close and play and play.

She felt hungry for her mother now. Such a deep new kind of hunger. She glanced at the old fiddle and grew cold as she thought what Jim had done. Oh, but that was gone! And what a rich wonderful life was coming!

The beautiful quiet old songs still came from the fiddle of Fritz. But how young deep-swelling leaping and thrilling with eternal life of love, would be the voice of Jim when it came!

"How much older." As her strength grew slowly, by days and nights and weeks, there was less dreaming and drifting, more quiet steady thinking. In the evenings when Jim sat by her, talking low

into the fire, even then she was thinking sometimes so hard that she caught only snatches of what he was saying. How much older and steadier he seemed, what children they had been before this. And now both were nineteen.

Would Jim's voice never come?

Weeks ago he had told her he was back at work in the stable, but as he laughed, describing how glad the old race horse had been to see him, somehow Gretchen had caught something queer in his voice, and the stronger she grew the more she noticed. A delicious curiosity stole into her thinking, until slowly, little by little, she guessed the secret, and then she lay back and laughed to herself.

She asked quick unexpected questions, which startled Jim and Fritz. Stupid male creatures—they gave answers before they knew it, and then how sheepish they looked!

"Vell," cried old Fritz one night, guilelessly rubbing his hands, "Christmas day ees almost here alreatty!"

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Christmas at dawn she opened wide her eyes and saw the sunshine pouring through the soft white curtains of her bedroom window, pouring clear and warm and rich and dazzling new.

Like the voice from the other room! Crude and young, now rough and stumbling, but pouring right on, clearing away all its own troubles and hers—warm and rich and dazzling new! It sang only to her! Love filled the whole voice, made it leap and burn and then grow suddenly soft and caressing—and so it would be forever!

The song had ceased. She lay half fainting with joy in the silence. She heard Jim's quick step toward her door.

Why did he stop? A long breathless silence. Low voices. His footsteps swift and angry. The outer door slammed.

And an uncertain fear stole into the joy of Gretchen.

## CHAPTER XII

### "NO OTHER WAY"

**A**S Jim sprang toward her door that Christmas morning, old Fritz's hand closed hard on Jim's shoulder.

"Not so soon!" he whispered. "Are you so fine? So pure? So safe? No, don't turn away! Look at me! So—sh-h-h!—she must not hear. Are you so fine—so pure—so safe? Mein baby ees mine! mine! You hear me? Mine! Not so soon!"

Jim turned abruptly and went out.

Fritz stood staring at Gretchen's door, listening. Slowly his face relaxed and his shoulders drooped forward.

He looked at his fiddle and went to it quickly, took it out and bent slightly toward her door, looking just as though he were going to speak.

The song began. But the bow trembled, the sound was rough and weak, and in an instant the fiddle was down—clenched in his hand. For Jim's



song had been so gloriously young and strong! Old Fritz sank into a chair, with the fiddle on his knees and his white head far down in his hands—shaking.

“How old—how old already I am!”

An hour later Jim stood in the doorway.

Fritz rose quickly.

“Don’t!” he whispered. Don’t say it here! Come!”

They went out together.

It was a long walk—at first fast, like Jim’s fierce questioning, but then slower, as the old German held Jim’s arm and talked.

“Yes you love Gretchen—yes! Und now I know so quick that Gretchen—she loves you!”

“Well?” cried Jim, eagerly.

“But Gretchen—why Jimmy, she ees already so young. Und her love for you ees so young, so fresh, so big in de heart, so little in de head. How can she know for all her life? How long ees life, how short und sweet in places! So many places, Jimmy; in some de music plays so quick und fine, in some so heavy—so slow. So many places ahead, und for Gretchen I vant all de music—quick und fine! Und you—are you old? Why Jimmy vot ees old about you?”

Jim glanced up, and then walked on a moment in silence. He spoke slowly:

"I don't know how it is, but I *feel* old. I tell you I feel a whole lot older."

"Yes," said Fritz, eagerly, "you *feel* old, but so you feel shoost because you are young. Ven you get really old den neffer you feel such a *oldness*. Only now you feel it—old und strong und safe und wise!"

He turned smiling and held Jim's eyes with his.

"But Jimmy vot are you? Shoost a big glad — beauty-song. Your heart—dot ees you. You feel, und now you feel so true. But how *vill* you feel to her for all your life ahead? Ach! Don't smile! Und Gretchen, how *vill she* feel for you? Vait! Don't turn away! I mean—for you—if you change, if again you be as you were on de street."

"What do you mean?" Jim's voice was sharp. Fritz looked back steadily.

"Jimmy, now you are fine, you are pure, you are safe. But vot haf you behind? Look back Jimmy look back. Would she love you if she saw all vot you did on de street? Maybe so. But would she love you if she saw you do all dose t'ings once more again? If she saw you take mein fiddle—take *her*

life—und gamble it in de race mit horses. Ach! Now you see!”

Jim had stopped short and stood staring into Fritz's eyes.

“Jimmy,” said the old man, gently, “I love you like mein son. I want you happy. But I want mein baby—so pure und safe und happy too—for all her life ahead. How can *she* know? How can *you* know? You must wait, you must show how strong you are. Jimmy you must fight down dot gamble!”

Jim was silent.

He walked on and on alone through the streets all day.

In the evening, when he came back and was met by Fritz on the landing, Jim was still silent.

Before Gretchen that night he was as he had been, except when he sang. And then the whole song was a struggle.

He finished and stood looking intently down at his music.

Gretchen lay a moment in silence. Then she looked up, her eyes wet but very bright, smiling.

“Jimmy, it's wonderful! Who has helped you?”

Jim started slightly, still looking at the music. Then his eyes met hers and he answered, slowly:

"The teacher your father sent me to. I went and sang for him."

Gretchen sat up excitedly.

"What did he say?"

Jim looked at her a moment.

"He said I had possibilities."

She sank back. How different from her dreams.

"But he has lots of men with possibilities," said Jim. "He said he could crowd me in three times a week. He knew I was broke, so he said he would cut his price in two and make it *only* two dollars a lesson. I had a little money left from that horse race, the part your father wouldn't borrow. So I used it, part on lessons and part to pay my share here. When that was nearly gone, the Skinner went and saw the proprietor of the 'Rip.' I knew nothing about it till the Skinner brought me an offer."

"The 'Rip!' " she whispered.

"What could I do but try it?" asked Jim. "I couldn't stop the lessons. They do me more good than the 'Rip' does harm. I tell you I'm not like I used to be. I'm older. And I know now just what I'm doing. I'm not burning up my voice."

He stopped a moment and then went on slowly:

"That was a month ago. I went to the man at

the 'Rip' and we had a long talk. He was might sorry about the way my voice broke that time three years ago. You don't believe it? Then listen. He said he was sorry because he lost money when I went. Don't that sound all right? And why did my voice break? Whose fault was it? Not mine or his or anybody's. My voice broke just because it got ready to change, that's all. That's what he says, and he's right. And now—why now as he says, there isn't any change to be afraid of. Don't you see?"

Gretchen's eyes grew more and more doubtful and anxious.

"Jimmy is *too* honest!" she was thinking.

"So he's mighty glad to get me back!" cried Jim. "He laughed and said, 'You're a safe investment! That's open enough, isn't it? Just plain business. But he likes me besides; he likes to see me an' Joe back.'"

"Joe?"

"Why yes," said Jim simply. And then, after a pause: "What do we know for sure about Joe? Is he bad or good? If he's doin' anything bad does it hurt him to play for me while I sing? Isn't it a good thing to keep him straight? But Joe—well Joe's queer. He goes all by ups and downs."

Two nights ago he scowled like a black devil every time he saw the proprietor, but last night he kept looking at the man and Joe seemed kind of mesmerized. He looked so queer we all got joking him about it—the proprietor joked most of all. He didn't like Joe at first, didn't want to take him back till he heard Joe play. Joe has some chords now that are wonders—mighty rough and awful sad, like Joe himself. The proprietor was tickled to death. He said those chords made a stunning set-off for my songs. My songs are all the glad kind now."

Again Jim's eyes had the same old dancing look.

"How did you fix the money part?" asked Gretchen. "Not in the same old way?"

"Well not at first," said Jim slowly. "But since then I've kind of changed things."

"Oh—Jimmy!"

"Now listen to this." Jim leaned forward. "Understand I don't say the man *is* square. But how could he have talked squarer here?—Listen. I told him at first I wouldn't sing unless he put me on a salary by the week. 'All right,' he said, 'do exactly as you please.' So I did. And he gave me ten dollars."

"Why," cried Gretchen, "that's only half what you got before!"

Jim looked down.

"You see," he said, slowly, "a *man's* voice doesn't make as big a hit as a good boy soprano; it doesn't bring as many encores—and anyway I can't grin at the ladies the way I used to. I'm too old—and—well, I'm not like the Hungarians—I can't do it."

"I hope you can't!" cried Gretchen, sternly.

"Well—but don't blame *him*. He pays me all I'm worth. I said I would only sing twice a night—that's not much. You see I was bound not to hurt my voice. So I went on for about a month, and he never said a word. Then I went to him and told him how I was fixed. I needed six dollars a week for my lessons, that left me only four to live on. He said he was sorry but he couldn't pay me more than the 'market price.' Then I asked him to let me sing three songs a night for twelve dollars a week.

"'All right,' he said. So I tried it for a week. But it was bad; I'll tell you why. Some nights the 'Rip' is packed full, and some nights it's empty and dull. On the big nights, if you do make a hit, you've got to be a good fellow and sing when they

yell for you; so I did—often four or five times. Then I got thinking it over. Why not get paid for those extras? I went to him again and he laughed hard.

"'All right!' he said again. And that settled it. Oh don't look so anxious! Please!"

Jim leaned 'way over, still holding her eyes with his. She saw his eyes change; she could feel he was keeping back something, something that made him suddenly anxious. His voice was very low:

"I tell you I *must* stay free! I'm made that way. If I must sing in the 'Rip,' it's better to be free and just get paid for what I sing. But I won't burn up my voice. It *won't* run away with me! And I'll never gamble again! Because—you'll help me—and we'll just hold it in—by ourselves. Won't we?"

Gretchen was gazing at him—or through him, far into the future.

"Gretchen! Don't you see? I must learn to sing—that's to be my whole life—and to sing I *must* have lessons—and for lessons I *must* have money. In the 'Rip' I'm up now to fifteen dollars a week—so now I can take five lessons instead of three. Fifteen dollars! Where else could I make it? Don't you see? There's no other way!"

\* \* \* \* \*



"No other way." How hard she thought in the next few weeks. Never had she wanted money and worried over it as now. More and more she felt that Fritz and she in their poverty were dragging Jim down.

Once she tried again to find work, but Fritz and Jim were so stern that she did not try again. She was still weak and did her best to get strong quickly; she rested much and took short walks, and those were times for more thinking.

She had long quiet hours at home with old Fritz between his lessons. She went over it all with him so intensely she never noticed how strange he looked, how lonely and old sometimes. He had more pupils now and was working harder. He made just enough to support them both, but could save nothing to pay back Jim the money they had borrowed in her illness.

"No other way." Jim went on with his lessons—absorbed and eager, and began improving fast. He went on with his nights in the "Rip"—and slowly, little by little, Gretchen watching him anxiously, could feel the effect on his voice.

Once more the "Rip" was fastening. The street was coming in.

## CHAPTER XIII

### "THE GLAD SURE FEEL"

**T**HE street swaggered in behind a huge bouquet of red roses. The bearer walked past Jim, made a low bow and presented the roses to Gretchen.

"Tired of t'rowing bouquets at meself," he explained, "so I'm doin' de next best t'ing."

Gretchen looked completely bewildered.

"This is the Skinner," explained Jim quickly.

"Yes," remarked that individual. "De Skinner—of Wall Street."

"Oh," said Gretchen. The roses dropped; she caught them and held them heads down. Still dazed she stared at the Skinner.

What a gaudy red necktie, what a racy suit, and padded shoulders, a big collar, red hair slicked down, and patent-leather shoes. What a lean square nervous face. What a sneer on his lips—in his eyes. Did he believe in *anything*? Just as she had thought. What a cold dangerous——

"If you'll just turn 'em heads up—they'll show off better." The lips of the demon smiled. "You see I want 'em in racing trim for to-night, for de café—where I'm going to present 'em with a speech, 'To Lucky Jim—de winner—from his humble admirin' boyhood friends—de news-boys!' "

"Now look here Skinner!" cried Jim leaping up in alarm, "don't be a——"

"There he goes," said the Skinner, with a patient look at Gretchen. "A genius—that's what he is—a genius. No business sense. If you stuffed a million dollars down his throat he'd only cough it up and go on singin'. Why Lucky don't you see how a little trick like this advertises you? You ought to buy a big bouquet an' have it presented to yourself every night. They do it in all—the big shows—Advertising!—But what's the use of talkin' to him?"

Again he turned with a grin to Gretchen:

"We've been looking to you to train him, and that's why I came." The shrewd gray eyes grew earnest—and held Gretchen's. "To tell the truth—which ain't my habit—I thought at first *you'd* be a drag on him. But——" he stopped short and watched her in sudden surprise. "Well," he said,

slowly, "I guess you had sense enough to see that yourself!"

"Skinner!" cried Jim, angrily.

"Hold on—Genius," said the Skinner loftily. "Just let me talk business with your friend. She knows an' I know—but you—you're a genius. Shut up! Madam, you ain't a drag—you were—but now you ain't. It's just on account of you he's beginning to think of money."

A painful flush spread over Gretchen's cheeks, but she still looked back, surprised—completely off her guard.

"And it's a good thing," said the Skinner in confidential tones—"I don't blame Jim a bit."

"Skinner!" from Jim. The Skinner now noticed the flush in both cheeks. He grew red himself—desperately red.

"Jim—will you give me a chance? Don't you see I never had any use for women anyhow? I'm doin' the best I can to get through an' go! Now madam look here. I'm Jim's old friend; I ain't saying much, but I'm watching him all the time." Again the gray eyes grew earnest. "An' I'm talking now *not* for publication—which means I'm speaking the truth. Lucky Jim was the only little kid I ever cared a lot about; he's the only man I'd

lend money to now—maybe. I hated you like poison—till I saw you had him an' there wasn't any use. So now I came here to see you, an' I'm mighty glad I came. You've growed into a woman that *is* a woman. Drag on him? Not a bit. Don't you fool yourself a minute! If it wasn't for you he'd burn himself all up singing, gambling, drinking, treating the whole gang. He always did. He's got it in his blood, learned it in the street. And it's not a bad thing to have! He's got to have it—only hold it in, that's all. And you can help him do it. I've seen I was all wrong about women. Look at all the big men on the street. Wives keep 'em out of the *little* games, steady 'em down, an' make 'em all the better for the big games that count. A wife is like a jockey on a race horse. Now listen:

“Big games is the kind for Lucky Jim. He never did things by halves, and he never will—he can't. He'll sing big or bust—only he won't bust. You're sure of that every time you hear him sing. It reminds me of a big man on Wall Street who has a voice like the subway, and when he's covering some stock that's getting shaky, he jest stands and *booms* out, 'U.-S.-Steel-preferred-is-going-up!' You can hear that voice *twenty feet* off in the howl; it booms

steady and sure as three o'clock, and when you hear it—you just know that *he's* sure to win. Well—that same feel is in Jim's voice—the *glad* sure feel. It'll take him 'way up into any Broadway show from Weber an' Fields to the opera, because all of us feel it when he sings, and we all like the feel—the feel of a winner. He'll draw packed houses—sure. All he needs now is to steady down an' watch his chance an' grab it, let the little chances go by and grab the big ones. Steady down—that's it. An' that's where *you* come in."

The Skinner stopped with a jerk, seemed half dazed at himself, watched Jim and Gretchen stare at him, and then he grinned all over his lean freckled face.

"An' this is where *I* go out. Just kindly hand me that bouquet. I hate to take 'em, but I ain't buyin' more than one bunch a day, an' I need this in my business; when Jim gets 'em he'll bring 'em back to you, anyhow.

"But just wait till he gets singin' on Broadway! You'll have bouquets coming till you choke. In your Fifth Avenue palace—bouquet annex—flower show—continuous performance—with me to show in the public!"

The Skinner now stood in the door, his lean

freckled face all one broad grin, his eyes snapping, head thrown back; and his voice rose in a jerky monotone like a "barker" at a Coney Island show.

"Ladies an' gents—step dis way. See Lucky Jim—boy gambler—grabs his chances—up he goes—café winner—grabs again—busts his voice—life tragedy—little Eva—here she comes—save him Eva!—up he goes—good little boy—hard at work—dreams of heaven—going up—love at last—grabs again—husband, lover—in one package—on he goes—vaudeville artist—opera star—keeps on grabbing—steady Jimmy!—hold him Eva!—keep the gamble—tone it down—up he goes—an' here he is!—ladies an' gents—right this way! Lucky Jim—gambler—singer—husband—winner!"

The Skinner gave one big wink at Jim.

"That's advertising."

He turned sharply to go out—and shoved the roses right into the face of old Fritz, who was waiting outside. The Skinner recognized him at once, stared at him—the grin changing to a sneer, and then he brushed quickly by.

Old Fritz looked after him a moment, glanced round at Jim and Gretchen, and then came in,

chuckling. But his chuckles were a little forced, and so were the laughs of Jim and Gretchen.

For all three had felt the street rush in—sparkling, wise, confident, dazzling! All three had felt it, but in such different ways.

It had given Fritz a thrill of uneasiness, which grew as he watched Gretchen laugh.

It had given Gretchen a deep rush of relief and joy as she saw a way out ahead. "Not a drag, but just what he needs!"

It had sent Jim soaring far into the future. The hesitation and doubt that Fritz's talk had implanted—was now gone. He knew himself now, knew what he had been, what he was, what he wanted to be. Grab his chances—yes! Grab hard!

Then as they both glanced at Fritz, who took off his coat still chuckling—they suddenly remembered the gap between them. Both felt a wave of impatience. The gap—and Fritz was to blame. How awkward it all was. The flush was still deep on Gretchen's cheek. She looked at Fritz. Dear old daddy—how slow and tired he was. Poor old Fritz.

The dusk deepened. Over by the piano Jim was singing with Gretchen.

Deeper and deeper grew the shadows—making



the little room seem suddenly large and mysterious—like the future before them.

Deeper and deeper—till the white head of old Fritz, bent and listening, was only a blotch in the darkness.

\* \* \* \* \*

And that night in the "Rip," Lucky Jim sang harder.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE WONDERFUL DREAMS OF TWO

**W**HAT a joyous five months together. Months she would remember long afterwards. Memories of Jim:

\* \* \* \* \*

A dazzling clear summer's night down the bay. They sat in their favorite corner, 'way out in the bow of the crowded boat, with a little orchestra throbbing faintly behind; gay voices, laughing, singing—all 'way behind; the quiet little waves in front—now hidden in long dark stretches, now gleaming in red streams of light from lighthouses out in the ocean; swishes, lappings, the solemn voices of bell-buoys and the low distant bellows of steamers; the deep confused murmur of the city—far behind, but as you listened it drew you back and back till again you could feel the street's roar. And Jim close beside her—staring ahead—his big black eyes twinkling, wondering, reverent before the big beauties of the world.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Dreamland" at old Coney Island.

A million sparkling lights! Lights above and below and around them—from tall white towers, from grotesque little theatres, gay cafés and quaint foreign villages, from canals and lagoons—from everywhere lights! And a band that set the whole world to rocking.

A million people—from nodding white-heads to chuckling babies, drifted this way and that and laughed! Laughed at fat anxious old men riding camels, at shrieking young girls who were shooting the chutes, at boys tumbling down long curving slides, at dignified women struggling up stairs that were endlessly bumping; they laughed when hats were blown off by blasts of wind from holes in walls, they laughed at mirrors that twisted them up into ghosts and giants and goblins. A million people laughed and hurried this way and that. The street, jerking, roaring and racing—all for fun!

Down the chutes they dashed—with Jim's deep ringing laugh in her ears, his big arm around her, and what a whoop he gave as they struck the lagoon!

"Come on! Try it again!"

"But Jimmy aren't we spending too much?"

"Come on! Too much is plenty!"

And down again! Then a cool grotto to stop and breathe in. Then a wonderful ballroom—and how he danced! And so on to new exciting places, where he scared the life out of cowards by painting the dangers ahead. “Glorious scamp!” she heard one old lady chuckle. The whole rollicking place seemed centered round Jim; she could feel it whenever she bothered to look. Every one watched him, listened to him, liked him. Blissful Gretchen!

\* \* \* \* \*

But the next morning—how different; how intensely he would work at his music.

Gretchen felt the same strength. She was ashamed of her long idleness. The money Jim had loaned them had not yet been paid back; and though Fritz had tried hard to earn more by copying music, he could save but little.

So again Gretchen began looking for work, and found it—trimming hats in a millinery shop in the Ghetto. Despite the protests of Fritz and Jim, she worked from eight in the morning until six at night, bending up and down over hats, smiling and talking with the young Jewish girls around her, but with her mind 'way off in dreams.

These dreams made her want to work harder—but they made her feel stronger too; so strong that

soon she was racing just as the others raced; she raced 'way beyond her strength—and fainted one night, and two kind young girls helped her home.

And so Jim's loan was only half paid up.

Then—when again she was weak and ill—Jim was the funniest nurse. He was thoughtful and tender—but in ups and downs. When he sang to her at twilight, she could feel how the thought of her suffering made him angry; his voice rose and shook, and abruptly stopped—and he was bending far over the big chair:

"Oh Gretchen—what a beast of a nurse I am!"

"Why?" She lay back with eyes closed—her lips twitching.

"Why? Because I sing loud enough for a ball game! Yes I do! And I'm through! No more singing in this room for two weeks! Well—let's talk about something—something stupid and sleepy. Tell me about—the days when you were a kid—dolls—nursery—anything. And do it slow! Don't get excited!"

And while she talked she watched him sideways. As he listened gravely, her lips would twitch harder, she would go into details so small and feminine that his face grew strained and desperate, till

at last she stopped and made him go on with his singing.

One night he brought her a stiff little bouquet of street roses—white, coarse and short-stemmed.

“The Skinner put me up to it!” he explained, triumphantly.

He brought exactly the same sort of bunch every night. It was wonderful how fresh she kept them—she still had Monday’s roses when Friday’s had come. This inspired in Jim the idea of seeking variety; he eagerly caught any hints of the kinds she liked, and he scoured the street stalls far and wide; he even went over to the North River docks and brought back beauties fresh from the boats. Sweet peas—big ones—pink and white and lavender, violets as autumn drew on, and soft red Liberty roses.

Gretchen at last grew uneasy. Here he was again—the same impulsive old Jim running away with himself; his clothes grew shabby, his shoes needed mending, his collars were threadbare—but still he bought flowers; and when she protested, he looked at her in such a way that it was dangerous for both of them.

One night just before supper, Gretchen, in her spotless little kitchen, was bending over the oven,

trying three big brown baked potatoes with a fork to see if they were done. She heard his quick step outside. He laughed and came into the kitchen.

"What bully potatoes!"

His voice was low and bursting with a secret. He held one hand behind his back; his thick curly black hair was all rumpled over his forehead, his big lips were twitching hard, eyes dancing down.

The hand swept out with a big dewy bunch of violets and pressed them to her face.

"Jimmy!" in half-stifled tones. "But why did you get them again?"

"Because," said Jim, calmly, "I've got two seats to-night—for the opera."

Gretchen dropped the violets and looked up, her hands at the sides of her quaint German apron, her face all flushed from the oven, her eyes all dazed.

Jim looked what he felt.

"You're a wonder to-night!" he whispered.

She turned and walked slowly into the other room, and saw old Fritz who had heard and was staring up from his copying. As her eyes met his she felt it harder. Would Jim never stop spending money? Fritz bent slowly again to his work, but stopped and his square old jaws tightened. Gretchen kept watching him.

He looked up cheerily:

"Jimmy, vot ees de opera?"

"Faust."

"Fine!" Fritz's face grew radiant. "So now hurry de supper!"

\* \* \* \* \*

From up in the dark gallery she gazed down over the silent heads and through the soft emptiness to the stageland far below. What delicious dreamy lights! What flowers and trees and starlit skies! And what voices!

She turned to look at Jim's face, at his big lips half parted, eyes shining. She could feel the voice in him!

She felt his pressure on her arm. The opera was all over! A moment they sat gazing into each other's eyes, while the people rose all around them. His face was still absorbed, as though still listening, and his voice shook in a whisper:

"I'd rather always listen with you than with any one—any one—always!"

And all that winter Jim kept watching the programmes far ahead, and took her one evening each week.

Each week he told how the great teacher had praised him; and she could see that even her father



was surprised and was changing toward Jim. Fritz told her what a great man the teacher was, how stern and sparing in praise, how much he could do for Jim if he would.

"Ach!" he cried, one afternoon, "I get happy—like a Frenchman! But shoost you remember," he added sternly to Jim, "years—years of hard vork alreatty yet! Don't jump too quick! Vork. Go slow!"

\* \* \* \* \*

How hard Jim sang in the "Rip" that winter.

Dago Joe bent far over the keys, absorbed in his own strange chords, struggling to suit them to the big glad songs, and always fiercely begging Jim to sing more—more—more!

But when Jim no longer refused, and sang more and more ard harder—then even Joe sometimes looked up anxiously, listening, as though afraid.

## CHAPTER XV

### GRETCHEN FACES THE STREET

**J**IMMY!"

She had sprung up from the piano, but now sank back, trembling, with her face in her hands.

Jim gave a short low laugh. She looked up.

"Don't!" she said. "You have no right to. You feel the same thing I feel. What is it?"

Jim bent over:

"Gretchen—you little—serious—old—woman. Won't you even let a chap have a cold when he wants to? It's not my voice—I tell you my voice is all right!"

But that night, up in the opera gallery, she watched him, forgetting the "Siegfried" motifs they had so eagerly studied all that week, and she saw that Jim was forgetting them too. He was staring not down into the place of soft lights, but straight out into the darkness.

In the next few weeks she could see him change.

He tried to leave out the twilight songs at home, but Fritz said:

"No—please sing—I haf a reason vy." And Fritz listened anxiously.

Sometimes the voice sounded even stronger and purer than ever; but in its new harsh husky moments she could feel what Jim was feeling. He would shake off the creeping dread and clear his throat and sing to the end. And at such times Gretchen no longer stopped, but played on with him; and when he laughed it all away, she laughed too.

But between times she was very quiet.

At last she talked it over with Fritz. Never had the old man seemed stronger or steadier.

"No—no," he would say, stroking her hair. "Not so bad—de voice ees only spoiled a little."

And then he would pull her 'way down in the old chair, and they had long times like they used to have; only now these times were filled with thinking and planning for some one else.

They made a wonderful quiet little plan that was to cure the voice and everything so nicely, but when they told it to Jim he laughed in a most painful way.

"I've thought of that," he said. "It won't do."

"But why not?" she asked, eagerly. "I know it's hard to go back to the stable, but the out-door driving and all that, it's just what you need. And you'll come home so dreadfully hungry, and I've splendid plans for big delicious suppers, and then in the evening we'll read aloud—your favorite books—and you can have lots of sleep; you can even sleep when I'm talking (you did it once) and that's just what you need. Jimmy, you know it is! Isn't it?"

Jim was quiet for a moment, and then spoke slowly:

"There's not enough money. That stable work is only ten dollars a week at the most. My lessons alone take twelve. I need twenty dollars a week to get along on. I've been making twenty-five at the 'Rip'—thirty in rush weeks—and I—haven't saved—a cent. No—I've got to stay in the 'Rip' and take my chances!"

He said this last so suddenly and in so different a tone that Gretchen jumped up out of Fritz's chair.

"What do you mean?"

As Jim looked back she saw all at once the change she had only half guessed before. A score of looks and tones she had noticed all flashed back to her—and this look was all of them in one. It

seemed to suit his broad face, set jaws, big lips and flashing eyes. The whole of Jim was tightening. He spoke again very low:

"I'm in a tight place—I know that—but it's just as the Skinner says—I've got to hold on and wait for my chance. I'll ease down at the 'Rip' to twenty dollars or even lower; I'll save my voice all I can. And besides," he gave a long questioning look at Gretchen, "can't you feel how I'm simply *bound* to—— No—you can't feel it."

"Feel what?"

They had both forgotten Fritz was there. Their eyes did most of the talking. Jim's eyes were searching hers.

"No," he said at last, "I thought you could—but you can't."

"Why can't I? Jimmy, what is it?"

"If you can't feel it, I can't make you. It's just the feeling I had when I was a kid—always have had it—the luck inside of me—a feeling that somehow—I'm simply bound to win."

Old Fritz half rose, but sank back—his wrinkled face set and angry.

Jim put both his hands on her shoulders.

"Gretchen—dear little girl—leave this to me—won't you?"

In those months of Spring, she felt his whole attitude toward her change. He grew tender, kind, protecting—in his good times; and in his bad times he kept silent—thinking and feeling by himself.

She could feel the old street creep in between them.

The sparkling street. He used to stare down into it at night through the window, and when in the hot weather the windows were open all night and the throb and the jerk and the roar of it all came in, he would lie back listening.

Again the street swaggered into the room, the Skinner came often. And as Jim had begun treating her like a "little girl," so did the Skinner now, only more so; he shut her out more and more, he took Jim away at night for long secret talks, and they smiled at supper over mysterious secrets.

Jim grew even kinder and more tender. And Gretchen grew very quiet.

The Skinner was now a "board-marker" in an office on Wall Street. His talk was all of stocks and slumps and rallies and flurries and panics, of millionaire grafters who had had the nerve not to get caught, of bank cashiers who had speculated, lost and tried again and lost—and then ended in prison or suicide; or more thrilling still, had escaped

by seizing a last desperate chance and winning. He told of out-and-out grafters who knew what they were, but here again were the "wise" ones who bribed the police, and the "fools" who went to prison. The Skinner's street from top to bottom was graft—a bewildering ladder of thefts from the millionaire to the pickpocket, all shaded down from respectable stealing to thuggery. And always the nerve that pulled men through. Nerve was everywhere.

Nerve in the bluff. A made B think A had something he hadn't. Or funnier still—A tried, and shrewd old B made A think B believed him. Or again—A found out B's secrets; or better yet—B knew A was spying and prepared fake secrets and let A find them. Stories so human and keen and sparkling that Jim would laugh till the tears rolled down his cheeks; and Gretchen watching this tried to laugh too. "Every man a liar" has been a glorious rich theme ever since Reynard the Fox, but never more so than now in the street of the Skinner.

Nerve in the fight. He was always talking of "killings" on Wall Street. At first Gretchen got these "killings" all mixed up with the suicides, and to her they always meant either some one really dead or in asylums or prisons. But soon she saw

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that to the Skinner and Jim these "killings" meant simply millions of dollars swept up in a minute by big men who ploughed straight on—trampling, "knifing," sweeping to left and right. Gretchen shuddered—and Jim leaned closer.

Nerve in taking chances. The most glorious nerve of all. For the grafting bluffing fighting old street—contradictory always, was forever young and rich in chances from Wall Street to Tammany Hall. Chances even in singing.

"What's a voice compared to a business manager?" cried the Skinner. "Is it you or the theatre trust or some new feller who is fighting the trust? Is it you or the theatre, lights, orchestra, advertising agent? Is it you or some rich feller that happens to pick you up and boom your name? You or the public? And how can you get to the public without money? And how can you get the money—without taking chances?"

And as Jim's broad face tightened, the Skinner leaned over and said:

"Lucky—you look just like you used to shooting craps. Only now your nerve is steadier. Do you remember that night when we won the big——"

And back rushed the Skinner, 'way into the past; Jim's face glowed, and they talked the old street



all over again—in lower terms. The “swiping” from fruit-stands, the endless bluffing, the fight to buy papers, the fight for a place to sleep, the ways they fooled the night watchman, the craps and poker and bets, the coffee, cigarettes and beer; and the nerve in getting out of tight places. They laughed till their eyes ran over.

Was Jim in a tight place now? Yes, but he had been long ago in scores of tight places, and had chanced it and won out! So the past gave advice to the present. And Lucky Jim grew natural.

And Gretchen, forgotten and watching Jim's eyes, was quiet. More and more quiet as the weeks of autumn drew on; quiet at twilight, when she heard Jim's voice grow worse by ups and downs; quiet at supper when the Skinner painted the fascinations of the street; quiet all the long evening while old Fritz rambled on about old dreams of love and childhood and music; quiet sometimes all through the night—alone with herself, planning and fearing and hoping, and planning all over again, and aching and growing so swiftly older.

The street came on. It moved like Jim in ups and downs, and now it was rising to one of its swiftest highest most dazzling moments. Election night was near.

Each evening, as the roar and the strain and the jerk and the throb rose higher, she could feel Jim watch and listen, she could feel it in the way he stared down into the crowd that roared round the Tammany speaker on the corner below; she could hear it in his voice as he talked hard and fast with the Skinner, a wild dark jumble of tips and quotations, "two to one money," "sure things," "dark horses," "split tickets" and "landslides." She could feel it most of all in that old hour of dusk, when the voice—grown harsh and husky—would go up and down, now strong and glad and fiercely sure; now deep-thrilling with suspense, impatience and dread.

In the "Rip" he had forced the pace up to forty dollars a week.

And the growing harshness in his song was like molten lead to the anxious ear of Gretchen.

In the last week Jim stopped all his singing, even his lessons. The Skinner came no more, but Jim went up after supper and often stayed until dawn. He would be up for breakfast, smiling, kind, reassuring—how she hated that manner. And then all morning he would sit by himself, the smile gone, his face set hard and bent over his papers, his eyes

moving steadily up and down columns and rows and scattered groups of figures.

All Election Day he stayed home, while the street roared steadily louder. And still he sat at night, staring out of the window.

The narrow Ghetto street—a surging mass of heads and tossing arms and nervous steps and eager eyes. Saloons poured out their crowds—laughing, shouting, swearing, singing; and high above shrilled the boy voices—"Extry! Extry! Extry!" More crowds poured in from the Bowery close by. They shoved and elbowed and joked, they bought papers and read and swore; horns blew, babies cried and were slapped, shrewd old peddlers called their wares; and the crowd pushed on and on to nowhere. But all stopped for a moment and surged around the election polls at the corner—staring through the closed doors at the judges.

Returns—returns! When would they all be in?

Jim stared down into the white glare and the yellow flares of the torches, and he never noticed the soft light from the old shaded lamp which she lit close behind him. He listened to the roar and the blasts of the horns, and never heard her ask him to supper. And when at last she put her hand on his arm, he turned like a flash and a wave of dis-

appointment swept over his face, which she noticed.

"Not here yet!" he muttered. Then he saw the look on her face and turned quickly back to the window.

For a long silent nervous hour Gretchen stood motionless—watching Jim. And old Fritz sat watching Gretchen.

A quick rattle at the door.

"Lucky!" yelled the Skinner bursting in, "Lucky, your hand! Good! Madam—your hand! Good! Money as far as you can see! So easy it was like takin' it from de quiverin' helpless fingers of a——"

"Skinner!" Jim's voice was low and shaking—"Get out!—Just a minute!—I'll be with you!—Here—wait out here!"

He closed the door and sprang back. Gretchen had sunk into a chair.

"Gretchen! Don't look so scared—or mad or—crazy or—oh I don't know what!" he laughed. "Guess I've forgotten how to talk!—But—listen! Look up, won't you?—Please!"

She looked up straight into his eyes, dilated now and sparkling. He leaned suddenly over her chair.

"Poor little girl—you don't see it now—but you will! Don't worry!—Try to sleep—Won't you?"

The next moment he was gone. She sprang to the door.

"Jimmy!—Jimmy!"

But only footsteps clattering down the stairs; the sharp excited voice of the Skinner; Jim's joyous laugh; and the roar of the street rising again in her ears—loud, pitiless, hungry!

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How much older.

She stood by the window.

Behind her the soft light of the lamp; in front, the hard flickering glare of the arc-light from the street; and sifting down between tenement roofs, the first dull light of day. Strange blending of lights.

Stranger still—each light seemed just to suit her face.

The quiet old light from behind streamed softly on the light-brown hair demurely braided in a quaint ring round her head, on the young tender serious profile, on the delicate lips, rounded chin, and girlish lines of neck and bosom.

But the hard flickering glare from in front showed a very different face—a high broad forehead contracted with worry and thinking; big round

blue eyes that gazed down as though still seeing pictures in the silent empty street, eyes that now struggled and burned and again grew quiet, thinking hard.

And from above, that dull light of dawn fell on a face weary, worn, despairing.

How much older.

Once old Fritz had come out in his queer short nightgown and put his arm around her and whispered:

"Ach—mein baby—not so hard—not all at once. Please—come to bed—please."

She had shaken her head impatiently, but when he kept standing there and she felt his arm tremble with the cold, she turned quickly and laughed and said:

"Let's make a nice big fire!"

At this Fritz was so relieved that he bustled about, getting her shawl, bringing a fresh bucket of coal from the box outside, and all the time reassuring her, praising Jim and minimizing all the dangers ahead.

"Ach! You will see! Yes—yes! It vill still be all goot und fine!"

"Yes," she said, quietly, "I *will* see. It *will* be—all good and fine."

Old Fritz turned and watched her. How much older.

When the fire crackled and glowed she kissed him good-night and went into her room. But when she heard his door close, she came out and listened till he was asleep, and then she relit the lamp, and again she stood by the window—watching.

Slowly, in the dull-gray light, she noticed big soft snowflakes drifting and wandering down past the window. Little by little her thinking drifted and wandered too, and grew dull—waiting.

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She knew Jim's step at once. It was quick, impatient and strong.

"So that is how he feels!" she thought.

She turned to the door, her face again growing rigid, but her big eyes very quiet.

The step paused outside, abruptly; a low laugh, a fumble with the key, the door moving open without a creak, and Jim came in.

His face was haggard, his collar turned up and his coat wet with snow, but his eyes were strong with a glad impatient light. His voice was low.

"Asleep?" he nodded toward Fritz's door.

"Yes."

"It must be after midnight!" He glanced smil-

ing at the clock. "What?—Five—o'clock?" He turned back to her. "Poor little girl—no wonder you look so queer—so old—so—— Gretchen! Are you sick? Please! Tell me—let me go out and get——"

"Tell me about it."

He stood now with his back to the fire, hair all rumpled, eyes snapping and twinkling. His low voice rose faster, describing the crowds, the Broadway parades and the torches by thousands, the booming bands and speeches and cheers.

"And all the time the Skinner and me kept hunting for that fool Republican, who was still backing his man for Congress! He wanted four-to-one money and we——"

"You wanted to try it again." So quiet.

Jim stared at her in surprise.

"Why yes! I'll tell you——" He stopped short. "But not now. You're too tired. I'm—I'm sorry I began."

"Please go on. I am listening—harder than you think. You see I'm not such a 'little girl' now. You've—made me see it."

For a moment she held his eyes until he saw that what she said was true.

"You mean"—she went on almost in a whisper



—"you mean that you went out—and the Skinner and the crowd and the rag-time music, the torches and the yells—all made you feel like—old times. And you had won money—you felt this—this luck in you coming up—and so you wanted to—try again. Was that it?"

"Gretchen—you're a wonder!" Jim's whole look was changing; his hands fell to his sides and he leaned forward, smiling. "Why just at supper you seemed ten years younger!"

"Yes. That was long ago." She too leaned closer now and tried to smile. "As long ago as—when you used to sing—with nothing bad—in your voice or—in you. You sang well—didn't you? We had some dreams—didn't we? We saw everything so bright ahead of us—*didn't* we? We heard only the good beautiful songs—*didn't* we? We had some dreams Jimmy—*didn't* we?"

As she fell suddenly forward he caught her in his arms.

"Gretchen! We'll see 'em all again—all—all! I'll sing; I'll leave the 'Rip'; I'll do nothing but my lessons! Only money first to do it. Just a few more lucky strokes like this one. The——"

"No!" Her eyes looked close up into his. "Now," she whispered, "don't you feel it? Don't

you feel you can stop if you only will? Oh don't keep me out! Jimmy! We *can* stop! And the voice will sing again! The voice we dreamed of—Jimmy!”

“If I stay in the ‘Rip’—no! Don't you know I love you? Love you! love you! love you! I've never said it—but you've always known—you know now—you always will! My life—voice—singing—all is you! I thought I could keep you out of—what I'm doing now, but I see I can't, all of a sudden you're old, you want to know! Then listen!

“In the ‘Rip’ my voice was going. Stop using it too fast? I couldn't! That's not me!”

“Yes,” she whispered, “you can—you can!”

“I tried—you know I tried, but I couldn't! Save money? I couldn't! I wanted to see you happy quick! We were! Weren't we?”

“Happy? Yes—so happy!” She clung to him trembling.

“We'll be happy again! Sweetheart—we will! But I know myself better than you. You can't feel what it is to have all *this*—this luck—'way down inside of you always waiting! And why is it bad? I need money, I tell you! I can't be worried *scrap-*ing it up, I can't strain and scrape so close to the

edge. Your father—how old—how long can he keep giving lessons? And you—you mustn't work. You nearly died once when you tried! I'd kill my voice first! So—I must have money! Enough to take us 'way up—out of all this—give my voice a chance—to live; give you and me a chance—to live! I must get money—quick!

"I've begun to-night. I bet—it was three to one—I had the small end—the best chance you could get in town. The Skinner got it—he's 'way on the inside—wise—wise—he got all the tips. I got some more—he worked 'em out—we *knew* it was sure. So I grabbed the chance, put up forty dollars—at three to one—an' waited an' won. A hundred and twenty! Then we found a man late to-night who still had hopes for a Congressman—he still offered money. I found him, gave him four to one, eighty to his twenty. I tell you I was sure! I could *feel* the luck would hold! It did—a hundred and forty dollars in a night!—Gretchen! Don't you see? *Can't* you see?"

But she lay back exhausted—her eyes closed.

"No. Not now."

Her eyes opened, holding his just for a moment, and she whispered:

"Only this: I won't keep out. Never! Tell me

everything always. It *will* be all right. But not now—not now—not——”

The room whirled, she heard Jim's voice suddenly kind and caressing, she felt his arm; he was carrying her into her room.

He was gone, and she tried to undress, then fell on the bed and pulled up the quilt and sank 'way down into darkness.

## CHAPTER XVI

### A NEW PLAN—FROM WHERE?

A MONTH had passed.

With the money he had won, Jim could afford to leave the "Rip." And now, with his teacher's help, the harshness and huskiness was slowly leaving his voice.

Never had he worked so eagerly as now.

Gretchen played while he sang, laughed with him, walked with him, dreamed with him, had long serious talks with him. But in spite of all her striving she could feel the old passion which the street had rooted in him so deep; it was rising now again.

The money he had won was almost gone. How get him more? How pay back what Fritz and she owed him?

She saw old Fritz growing feebler each day. Even his scanty earnings might soon stop.

She had a long inner struggle—fighting down bitter old memories.

And at last, in the autumn, she went back to Miss Louise.

She found in Miss Louise's face a startling change. It was twitching and strained, and the eyes kept impatiently shifting.

Gretchen hurried through her story.

"You see," she ended, "his whole voice—his life—everything depends on what happens now. If you could only hear him sing you'd feel how dreadful it is to have such a voice just ready to be lost for good and all. And it's so easy to save it. If only now he didn't have to bother about money, he would throw himself into his music and forget betting and Wall Street, and——"

"Forget Wall Street?"

Miss Louise's laugh was very short and low, but bitter.

"Forget—Wall Street. You—poor baby."

In a moment she had forgotten Gretchen. But Gretchen watched her face, and at last leaned over:

"Do you mean—your father—on Wall Street—something has—happened?"

"Yes something *has* happened. But you were speaking of Jim, Lucky Jim the Gambler. Well, you poor little innocent, let me tell you something."

Miss Louise leaned forward—her dark hand-

some face more tense than ever, her brown eyes flashing with pain.

"Lucky Jim *was* a gambler—he *is* a gambler—he *will be* one always. Do you hear?—always! They're all alike. If you want to be happy—leave Jim alone. If he wins and then wins a thousand times and gets a house like this or a dozen houses—even then he'll never forget—he'll only play for bigger stakes! His voice?" she laughed. "Voice, wife, daughter—they must all go—do you hear? All! Nothing is so deep in him as the game he's playing—because that's his life."

Again she had forgotten Gretchen.

"That will always be his life," she murmured, as though to herself, "and the life of his family—Oh, what a funny world it is!"

Gretchen bit her lips to keep down her blaze of anger. How she hated this lady now. The hard laugh, the hopeless eyes, the "funny world," the "leave Jim alone." What a weak selfish brute of a woman!

But Gretchen kept silent. It was her only chance. She looked down to hide her hatred.

"Why Gretchen!" cried the lady suddenly. "You're—why, how much older you look—you're a woman!"

Gretchen looked up and held the other's astonished shifting suffering brown eyes with her own big steady blue ones.

"Yes," she said quietly, "*I'm* a woman."

Miss Louise took her hand.

"Gretchen, tell me about him—all over again. I'm sorry I didn't listen at first. Tell me."

"Never mind about him—please. I won't bother you. I only came to ask if you can help me to get back my old work—embroidery—for you or the other ladies?"

"Of course I will. But Gretchen child—tell me—what has changed you so wonderfully? I'm interested!"

"I'd rather talk about work."

So they did.

And then Gretchen went away and began her thinking.

So it was all as the Skinner had said. Only how much deeper now, how real and close.

At supper that night she heard the Skinner tell of a fight that had shaken the whole "Street"; the nerve of the man who fought; how he had kept things secret till the very last and then had grabbed every force in reach and hurled it; gathered new forces, fighting on and on to the very end; and then



when the crash had come—the way he had saved the remnants and kept his head up for a fight some other time. The nerve of the man! And the man was Miss Louise's father.

Was the whole business world a gamble?

"A gambler he is and he will be one always!—Leave Jim alone!"

How she hated Miss Louise now. A quiet steady beginning of hatred.

But she forced down her hate and went from house to house. The work piled up. And as she sewed harder and harder, slowly her thoughts and plans and hopes and fears were all sewed into her work. What a relief it was to be doing something.

But still she could feel the street come on.

As Jim's money dwindled, he had again begun poring over sheets of figures. He went away early each morning and came back at a little after three o'clock—his face strained and haggard. He would swallow a cup of tea, take his music and rush off to be in time for his lessons. And at night out came more sheets of figures. Sometimes listening from her bed she could hear him turn page after page—now nervously, now very slowly, until long after midnight.

One day he came home early—at two o'clock.

He stood a moment at the window, his big shoulders slouched forward and his black eyes had lost all their old twinkle. They were dull, staring at nothing. Only his hands slowly clenched behind his back.

Gretchen watched him:

"You're early."

"Yes—I'm early." His voice was loud and unnatural. "There was nothing left to wait for."

She dropped her sewing.

But in a moment she rose, went into the kitchen and came out soon with tea and cold ham and two crisp thin slices of toast. He was still by the window. She stopped—with the tray in her hands, set it down gently, went into her bedroom and came back in a few minutes wearing the soft white muslin frock that Jim liked best. As she moved about setting the table, she hummed an old German sleep-song—the same song she had hummed that night long ago when Jim's voice had cracked.

He turned slowly and saw her, and his glance fell.

"Jimmy—please—the tea is getting cold—and it's nearly time for your lesson."

"My lesson!"—his voice was a harsh whisper

now. "Oh yes, my lesson! I'd forgotten I ever had a——"

He turned suddenly back to the window and she could see his hands again slowly clinch behind him.

"Well!" He turned—with a laugh struggling up through the pain in his eyes. "What a fool I am! Let's drop it. Let's have *two* cups—shan't we? Come on—have some tea with me—be a good fellow!"

He talked on, faster, talking down the hard look each time it rose in his face.

He drank and ate nervously and went away.

Late that night he came back.

He spoke at once, standing beside them. His voice was again low and natural.

"I've just gone back to the man at the 'Rip.' I told him why I had left him two months ago—because my voice was going. I told him what I've been doing and—how I've lost out. I won't bother you with it—you wouldn't understand. It was twenty shares on a stop-loss margin. Something broke and I lost every cent. I told him what my teacher said about—what my voice might be. I asked him to take me back. He said it would have to be at a lower rate of pay. I asked him why.

He showed me that he was right—a plain business proposition—of demand and supply.”

Jim smiled bitterly.

“I had Joe with me, and you ought to have seen the way Joe looked at the man. Demand and supply—wait till I get it straight.”

He spoke slowly—still smiling.

“What an easy time these business men have with us poor devils. Demand and supply—a bigger supply of café voices in New York at this season—more Hungarians and Italians imported. He said the market was overloaded this Fall—with apples and voices. Great joke!—But Joe didn’t see it! He ran over to the piano, he began pounding out one of our songs from Naples, and I sang it—hard!—And you ought to have heard the people clap and yell!—Then the proprietor laughed and said, ‘Well—I guess in your case the demand has gone up too—so we’ll make it the same old pay.’ And Joe—he growled, and swore under his breath that he’d kill the man some day!—Joe kept begging me to sing all night. But I stopped early. I think that this time I *can*—keep on—stopping early.”

“Can you?” cried old Fritz in a harsh bitter voice. “Can you ever go slow? Can you?”

"Of course he can," said Gretchen quietly—still sewing. "Can't you, Jimmy?"

As she looked up she seemed to lose hold of herself, but in an instant her eyes were steady again and her lips parted in a smile.

"We can—can't we, Jimmy," she whispered. "Let's have our song now—just one—and then you must sleep."

The old Jim came back in the old song that night.

But afterwards, after the cozy little supper they cooked together so merrily, after Jim had gone to bed—she lay awake for hours and hours. And she could hear him tossing.

So it was all the next month. Together they sang and laughed and were so sure they could hold the voice in. But alone it was different, alone she sat for hours at her sewing, bending 'way over, her brows knitted.

For now she knew.

Her simple little plan—just to sew night and day to pay back Jim and so stop his worries about money for his lessons—this plan was going to fail. It was too slow. The street moved faster.

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A new plan—from where?

From old Fritz?

She could see he was silently making a plan of his own, and was only waiting for a good chance to speak.

The chance came one winter's afternoon. Jim had come in from a long morning in Wall Street. He sat down by the window and bent over his sheets of figures—fiercely, as though gripping something almost in reach. When Gretchen lit the lamp he hugged the window closer and went on watching by the dim fading light above, still went on by the quivering glare that poured suddenly up from the street. The soft quiet light from the lamp streamed on his face; now and then he glanced back at it impatiently; he put up his hand to keep it from his eyes, but the light streamed on. At last he gave in.

"Well! *That's* done!"

He jumped up and moved in quick nervous steps about the room.

"Yes—done!"

He stopped and stared into the comfortably glowing coals.

"And done just about right too," he said slowly.

"Just—about—sure."

"Jimmy." She was at the piano. "Just one song before supper."

"Yes. Bully!—Just—about—sure—if it will only——" He stopped and stood smiling into the fire.

"Jimmy?"

"What is it?—Oh yes! The song!"

He came to her quickly.

"What shall we have to-night? Just what you like best. And we'll sing it hard this time—hard!"

And so he did. The voice to-night was gloriously rich and resonant, the very air thrilled with it. But strong as it was, the feeling beneath it—straining and grasping—was stronger still. Never had Jim sung so *hard* as now, never had he *felt* so *hard*, so fierce, so vibrating to the depths of him—waiting.

So hard that when he had finished and had gone out hastily without his supper, Gretchen still sat at the piano, staring straight before her.

Then she felt old Fritz's two hands on her shoulders. The hands stole slowly and caressingly around and met on her bosom and softly drew her back, till she turned her face up, and her eyes—big with pain—met his.

"Mein baby," he whispered. "Now—you see—how he ees?—He vill be always so."

His whisper rose abruptly to a cry, loud and shaking.

"Ve haf done all—all! He must not burn your soul for all your life ahead! He must go away—by himself. It ees not—too late—for you. *You* can be happy——" his voice broke into low broken laughter, "happy like you used to be—happy like your mother vas. 'Fritz!' I hear her already in mein dreams at night, 'Our baby—make her happy—make her safe.' So she speaks—und you vill listen. Let *me* help Jimmy—I vill do for him all I can. But you—be happy—be safe! Leave him alone for now!—Don't—don't turn away."

She turned quickly back—her eyes brimming.

"Dear daddy," she whispered. She laid her cheek, hot and flushed, against his, which was wrinkled and cold; again and again she kissed him and murmured caressing little words from old times; and grew quiet.

So quiet.

"Leave—Jimmy—alone?" Her voice now was low, but so steady and strong—like the look in her eyes, that he only stared back in silence.

"Leave—Jimmy—alone?"

Her eyes told him the rest.

The next morning Fritz began working harder



still. And Gretchen went on sewing, picking out parts of plans old and new, building, abandoning, building again.

\* \* \* \* \*

A new plan—from where?

She went to the Rip Van Winkle.

When the proprietor saw her enter the empty café, he came forward smiling.

“Gretchen! Why so it is! Little serious Gretchen!—But how much older.”

He looked at her admiringly.

“Why—you’re a woman!”

“Yes, yes.” She spoke hurriedly. “I’m old—and so we can talk in a business-like way. I can see now how you felt about my father; it was just business, wasn’t it? You didn’t want to discharge him, but he kept losing you money—so you had to. He doesn’t fit New York as well as Nürnberg, he doesn’t fit you, he never understood you—as I do now; he never would have come here—as I do now; to ask you to help Jimmy. But——”

“Oh yes he would! He knows me better than you think. He was here about Jim only two days ago.”

“What?”

Gretchen sank into a chair. She felt her plan all slipping away. But she gripped herself hard and stood up.

"Yes. Of course. He must have come. It just shows you how anxious we are—when even my father would——"

"Oh but why not? You aren't fair to me. When I tell you what I said to him——"

"Don't! Don't tell me anything he said or you said—please!" She tried to smile. "Just let me begin it all fresh. And I won't be long, for I know how busy you are. All business men are the same. When I sew with their wives or daughters or mothers I've been asking so much about these men lately that now I feel I almost know them. And you are all alike. And so I just want to talk about Jim in—in a business-like way."

She sat down quickly.

"If Jimmy's voice," she began, "came to be famous all over the world, wouldn't that be a fine advertisement for you—to say he had come from your café and that you had helped him up?"

"Well! I'd be proud to have done it anyway!"

"No—but in a business sense—wouldn't it? Wouldn't it be a good investment just to—to make sure that Jimmy *would* get famous?"

"Decidedly! What a good little business head you have. That's just what I told your——"

"Never mind what you told! A good investment *if* it were *safe*—that's what you were going to say. But can you always get safe investments? Is anything absolutely safe? Why of course not! I mean I should think not. I've heard the ladies speak so much about their husbands—the *very* men who do the—the best—in business. And *they* don't always make safe investments. Oh no—I almost think they use the unsafe ones more than the safe ones. It's like on the race track. You——"

"Race track!" cried the astonished proprietor. "What do *you* know about——"

"Yes I know about that too," the anxious voice hurried on. "You see, I've learned so much lately. On the race track you like to bet one-to-two, because if you *do* win—think how much you get. I've asked some of the ladies about it and they laughed and said they never went, but they said their husbands liked the one-to-two bets—I mean investments—in their business. Please don't smile—I know I'm telling you what you know already, all business men know it. If you see a chance where there's a whole big fortune to win—and it's almost

sure—wouldn't you put just a little money into it?"

"Yes—certainly. That's what I told——"

"Oh wait! Whatever you told any one else doesn't matter! If you want to make a business investment you want to learn about it from the person who knows it best. Well—in this case I'm the person. I care more for—his voice—than for anything else in the world—so I've watched it and I can tell you more about it even than Jimmy can himself. I won't tell you what *I* think about it or what my father thinks or what the ladies who come here think. You know that already. And anyway, the voice is going to be so much greater than any of them think! You'll be surprised when I tell you! I've remembered it all exactly, to give you careful business-like information."

She stopped—her face tense with thinking, and then she spoke in a queer slow monotone—as though giving legal evidence.

"On the evening of August twelfth he came home and told me that his teacher—oh! I forgot something! Please remember that his teacher is the greatest in New York! Now I'll go on again—He told me that his teacher had said, 'My boy, I am immensely pleased at something I find in your

voice that I never felt there before.' That was in August. A great many times in the next month the teacher said other things, I have tried and tried, but I can't remember them and I dare not ask Jimmy because I can see that he hates to think of them now. But the teacher *did* say them—splendid things! And so you see, it *would* be a good investment!"

She had looked up, eagerly. She looked down now and went on in the slow formal speech:

"On the afternoon of September the nineteenth, he told me that his teacher had gripped his hand tight, just as he was leaving, and said, 'Keep on! And some day I shall be proud of you!' And please remember—he said this at the very moment when Herr Bauer, the famous baritone, was standing in the other room, waiting; the teacher even kept Herr Bauer waiting to say this, and he almost introduced Jimmy to Herr Bauer. I then asked Jimmy if the teacher spoke to Herr Bauer about him, and Jimmy said Herr Bauer turned all of a sudden and stared at him. So of course the teacher had spoken of him—I mean I should think so.

"Then on the evening of November the seventh he told me that the teacher had asked two friends in to hear Jimmy sing a certain song, especially to

hear him take a certain high note; I can't remember now just what note it was, but it was *very* high for a baritone, and then they made him sing as far down as he could, and they were surprised—*very—much—surprised—at* his range. I then asked Jimmy who they were—famous opera singers or big managers or teachers—but he didn't know. Oh! please remember that this teacher is not only the best in New York, but he is also the quietest, the most severe, the crossdest, the meanest, the hardest—perhaps I make him out too bad, but all I want to say is that he never praises anybody, so when even *he* says such splendid things to Jimmy—why—can't you see—it—it *would* be a good investment?

“Now there's another part, and this is the last part.” Her voice sank and she spoke faster. “You know how fast his voice is being hurt by singing here; the same as it was hurt here twice before, only then he stopped in time, and now I'm afraid he won't be able to. He is gambling again and worse than ever! Isn't it terrible to just take your voice and—and everything in your life ahead—all down to Wall Street, and say, ‘If this stock goes up my life will succeed; if it goes down my whole life will fail!’ That's just what he is doing. And so he

comes here at night and sings harder, harder, harder, to get more money to gamble! Even *you* can hear his voice grow worse. I can feel it now on so many notes and in so many other ways, because I know all about the voice—just as though it were a—a house I lived in.”

Again her face tightened; again the strained look and the precise deliberate monotone.

“On the evening of December twenty-fourth he told me his teacher had said, ‘If you go on like this your voice will be spoiled beyond hope of ever saving!’—This means—it means—that you will lose the chance to make him into a safe splendid investment. But you won’t lose it—you won’t—you won’t—you can’t!—Please excuse me. I will talk quietly. All you need do is to make him stop for a little, loan him a little money, perhaps—five hundred dollars—for lessons.

“Is that so much? Just think how rich you are getting, how much money you have made in the last fifteen years since you forced my father—I mean—how rich you are and how rich you will be if you’ll only make this investment!

“And think of what will happen if you don’t. He will gamble and gamble and gamble, his face will grow whiter and thinner and harder, and all

this you will feel worst in his voice. And this will be bad for your business. I can tell you for sure; I know, because I'm a woman; I've talked with Miss Louise and so many rich ladies whose fathers or husbands gamble. They all hate it, I tell you! It frightens them. And so when they come here for fun and bright music and laughing, they'll hear this in his voice—always harder, fiercer, wilder! And they'll all go away. And—and so you'll lose money. And you can save it all by just five hundred dollars. Is that so much?

“Why think of what will happen if you do. He will go up so fast! In a few months he will come back and sing and you will be surprised and all the people will be surprised at his voice! I can feel just how it will be; I know the voice so well; I know what parts of it are harsh and weak now, and how it will sound when they are all made rich and smooth. And a good deal more than that—I know how Jimmy himself will feel. Jimmy was born just to be glad and sing. He always said he wanted only the glad songs. And now he *will* be glad and you will hear it all in his voice. No more gambling or shaking or straining, the whole feeling of it will be so happy and safe and sure that all the people will *have* to listen because it will be such a change



from their own hard nervous lives. So—so they will come here in crowds and—and so—he *will* be a splendid investment! Oh don't you see? Don't you? Don't you?"

The man looked at her a moment pityingly.

"I have already loaned Jim—three hundred," he said.

Gretchen rose—slowly.

"Yes—three weeks ago." The man's voice was low and kind. "And now—what else shall I do? Make him stop singing here for the next few months? I'll do that if you say so."

She suddenly laughed:

"How different you are from what I thought you were!"

"You thought I was a brute. So did your father. I *am* half a brute. So are all men. It's been in our blood for thousands of years, and business brings it out. Don't you see, it's not me, it's not my café, it's not Jim—it's the whole system. It's all just one big fight. And you can't get out if you want to.

"Look at Jim. He is in. The Skinner has got him into the pettiest, most dangerous kind of speculation—'on margin.' Jim is counting ahead on every cent he will make here in the next few weeks,

and if I make him stop, and the money is taken away, it may just be enough to spoil his game on Wall Street. Don't you see? He's in too deep! He can't pull out! And what's more, he won't. If I loan him another three hundred he'll only sink it and go on singing to get more. It's all a fight, and Lucky Jim's a bully fighter; I've always seen that in him, and that's why I loaned him the money. I'm backing him to win!"

He looked pityingly at her; her eyes were glistening—fixed on the floor.

"Now," he said kindly, "if I were you I would not worry about this any longer. He'll come out all right. You're putting it too strong about his voice. I hear it every night, and it's not half as bad as you say."

Gretchen looked up.

"It's worse," she said, quickly. "I was afraid to say how bad it is. It's worse. In a month or two—it will be gone. He'll burn it up. You will help him. Your café will help him. The Skinner will help him. Wall Street—your 'whole system' will help him. Even if any one *gives* him money it will just go into his gambling. That's it, isn't it?"

"Exactly! But why won't you look on the bright

side? I tell you, Lucky Jim will win! I shouldn't be at all surprised to see him clean up an even thousand in the next few months—and then——”

“Then,” she said, “he'll go in deeper. By that time his voice will be spoiled and he won't want it anyway. The other side of him will be all of him. He'll be like that—all his life—till it kills him.”

She spoke with such a strange quiet that the man watched her curiously.

“But what can you do?” he asked.

She smiled.

“I can get money—plenty of it—and then keep it myself—and only let him use it for his voice.”

“But where can *you* get—plenty of money—so quick?”

“I will. I see what you mean by saying that everything is a fight. And I—I guess I'm beginning to have it in *my* blood too.”

She laughed up at him—a hard little laugh.

“Just to fight without caring what you hurt— isn't that what you mean?”

But as she saw the half-shocked look in his face, her own face changed quickly, hiding something.

“But what's the use? I'm only a woman, and we women aren't supposed to fight, are we? We must be good and gentle and honest. Well—per-



A new plan—from where?



haps I can—*beg* the money. That's it. Thank you for all your good advice. Good night."

\* \* \* \* \*

In the next few days and nights, again with slow desperate care she racked her mind for a way out.

A new plan—from where?

One blustering dark afternoon in March she sat sewing hard under the old lamp. Suddenly she looked up and gave a startled cry.

A short burly figure, dirty and dark, stood in the doorway. The old slouch hat was squeezed tight in the enormous grimy hands, and from under the matted and tumbled black hair there looked out two big dull coarse eyes.

As Gretchen stared, the eyes dropped to the ragged shoes.

"I——" Joe cleared his throat, "I don't wanta make you so scare. I wanta see you bad—but—I come again."

He turned to go. But Gretchen sprang up.

"Joe! Don't go! What is it?"

He turned a moment, hopefully, but when he saw the look in her eyes—a fascinated stare, he looked down again, turned and went slowly away.

All through the dusk and the night that followed—how quiet was Gretchen! How little

thought showed now in her eyes. How much doubt and fear and bitterness and fierce joy by turns. How much amazement at herself.

She could hardly have told what she felt. Only that the old black shadow—so close now, so real, was creeping up out of the street, not to Jim this time—but to herself!

She shook it off fiercely and tried to sleep. It came again. She fought it down and fell asleep exhausted, just before dawn.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE STREET EDUCATES GRETCHEN

**W**HAT a quiet place.

She had followed Jim downtown, keeping well behind him, and behind him she had slipped, unobserved, into a big broker's office on Wall Street.

A half dozen rows of chairs faced a blackboard that reached to the ceiling. She slipped into a chair in the rear and sat there—awkward, uneasy and dazed. Already she could see surprised glances from the men around her.

Dazed. Vaguely she wondered why she had been so dull and queer for a whole week past. Why had she come to this place?

Then she saw Jim in the front row, and at once she remembered. She had come here to see if all that the Skinner and Miss Louise and the others had said was true.

Well—it wasn't true at all. She half smiled in



relief. The Skinner had talked of a great big hall full of men, shouting and screaming and waving their hands. But here it was quiet.

There was the Skinner now, before the big blackboard, marking down figures—fast—as though he were racing!

She bent closer. *His* face was not quiet! The rows of faces watching—were not quiet! Jim's face—not quiet! What was it?

Only a huge square blackboard. Tall columns of figures—with queer initials at the head of each column. She looked hard, but at first she could make out nothing. Then she noticed the big names near the top. "New York"—"London"—"Berlin"—"Paris." She began to hear around her the names of stocks; she connected some names with the queer initials. And in a flash she saw the whole thing—or thought she did, understood it all, needed to see or hear no more.

This board was a map of all the business in the world! All the business in the world was jumping silently up and down with the figures. She watched one column—85, 85 1-8, 85 1-4, 85, 79 3-4—up and down! And the same in all the columns.

So the Skinner was right. All the business in the world—was—gambling.

But how quiet.

Only a low constant ticking, which came from a round glass case, out of which a white paper tape was always pouring. She looked closer. On the tape was a row of figures. More figures up and down—pouring in from all over the world.

How big it all was! Were there more rooms like this? Or was this room the center of all business? It looked nervous enough to be anything!

So did the men who came out the glass offices, close behind her. Rich? Yes, they looked just like Miss Louise's father. Quiet nervous faces, but strong, as though they knew just what they were doing and were sure of winning.—

But look at Jim. How weak and young and out of place he looked—leaning back, his big hands working up and down the back of his chair; and his face—she could only see the profile—rigid and bloodless. Only now and then he wet his lips with his tongue; he was staring at just one column. "Amal. C." What did Jim know about "Amal. C.?"

She watched, unconscious of the pitying looks and amused smiles of the men around who saw her; she never even felt the light touch of the tall man in uniform who wanted her to leave.

How weak Jim looked! So different from the others. How had he ever been allowed to come in? It must have been the Skinner. How unnatural *he* looked. His work just fitted his face; he kept jumping from one column to another, jotting down his quick nervous figures, bringing them from all over the world, setting them there—all the business in the world—right before Jim, who knew nothing and only stared.

She saw Jim suddenly bend forward. The Skinner was at the "Amal. C." column! He turned to Jim and winked a big joyous wink, and Jim smiled, took a quick shaky breath and leaned back. "Amal. C." had gone up!

She rose, saw the man in uniform, blushed, smiled painfully and hurried out.

She walked home fast, and as she walked she was thinking in that same dull dazed fashion:

"Yes—it's all like that—all a fight. So I must be like that too. But not yet. I can wait just a little."

\* \* \* \* \*

She waited two weeks.

While she sewed she kept seeing the rich quiet room of the ticking, and Jim's face watching "Amal. C." on the blackboard.

The dull dazed feeling lifted, slowly at first and then swiftly, as the street came on faster!

One night Jim came home from his lesson and said, with a bitter laugh:

"My teacher told me to-day that I'm burning up my voice in the 'Rip.' He said I didn't deserve to have a voice, and he wouldn't have anything more to do with me till I quit what he calls 'gambling.' "

Just for a moment Gretchen thought she saw a new plan. She spoke slowly:

"Why couldn't you tell him why you do it?" she asked. "Tell him how badly you need money. Wouldn't he help you over the next few months?"

Jim laughed again.

"Few months? My voice needs years of work yet. No—I wouldn't ask him. But it's all right. In a few days more I'll have money enough! And then I'll stop and do nothing but work on my singing!"

Gretchen looked away.

"No," she said quietly, "I was silly even to think of it. If any one gave you money you'd just gamble with it.

"Any one—except me," she was thinking.

It was growing clearer.

"Vell!" Old Fritz stood white and feeble and trembling in front of Jim. "Now you go out. You haf lost your teacher. You haf killed your voice—your beauty voice! You haf only gambled—and so you vill—all your life ahead! Now you——"

"Stop!"

She caught his old arm.

"Daddy!—Look at me!—You won't say anything too fast."

She led him into his bedroom and there he fell across the bed; she kissed him and came out and shut the door.

Jim still stood amazed, angry, uncertain what to do.

She sat down to her sewing.

"No. You won't go away," she said, as though he had spoken. "You won't leave me when I ask you not to!——We must just go on and—do the best we can. Don't say anything, please. I want just to think now by myself."

She felt him watch her, she saw him sink into the big chair by the fire; he rose nervously, went to the window and began poring over those sheets of figures—his thoughts 'way off at the blackboard. Then she wanted him back.

"Jimmy!" she smiled over at him—"You don't

think—even a little—about anybody—except ‘Amal. C.’—do you?”

Jim looked up.

“What in thunder do you know about copper?”

“Oh, ‘Amal. C.’ is copper!—why, you see, I’m learning about Wall Street. When is it coming?”

“What?”

“The piles of money or the smash-up?”

“In about a week.”

Her smile had gone, she bent again quickly and sewed faster.

How clear it was all becoming. What horrible days and nights they had been, and now what a relief to be almost decided!

But not yet.

In the next two days she had more spells of uncertainty, pain and dread; spells when she was almost ready to beg on her knees from Miss Louise, from all the ladies, from the teacher, from the man at the “Rip”; or even to just drift on and let things go as they pleased—anything to escape the new plan she was making.

Right in the middle of one of these spells—two days later, in rushed Jim—his eyes no longer strained and weak, but blazing down into hers.

“Gretchen!” His voice was low but glad—so

glad. "I've won! Eight hundred and ten dollars! I'll begin my singing; I'll stay at home; we'll sing wonderful songs; we'll go to the opera; we'll do everything! We'll——"

"Jimmy!"

Her hand, icy cold, touched his and made him stop. She looked up—eager, half despairing, half hoping.

"You mean—you are through?"

"No—not yet! I'm playing my old game, the Skinner got a straight tip from the inside last night; I'm in again with all I've got, but it's sure! And to-morrow I'll quit, so to-night let's have a bully old song—one of the old, old-timers."

"No—we won't sing."

She went into her room and lay there, listening, while he sang alone.

"Yes," she was thinking. "Why wait and hope any longer? Why not begin?—Why not—begin?—But listen!—How strong his voice is to-night!—How strong now!—Strained, hard, husky—now!—But now so deep, so sure!—I'll wait—just a little—until to-morrow."

\* \* \* \* \*

To-morrow was a blurr.

Long afterward she learned how one of the big

fighters, who for months had been telling the public that Wall Street was rotten, now sent his telegram flashing out over the country—bringing “Amal. C.” down with a crash.

At the time, she only felt vaguely that everything was slipping.

She could see it in Jim’s twitching face, in his blazing eyes.

At noon he had come rushing in, had caught her arm, and was talking in swift low unsteady tones.

She stood holding tight to the table behind her. Vaguely she heard his voice—as in a nightmare.

He wanted her to give him all the money Fritz and she had saved!

“Well,” he cried at last, “why don’t you speak? I must have it quick! Will you? Will you?”

“No!” she whispered.

“You won’t? You’ll let all my——”

“Wait!” she whispered. “You say you know it’s sure! But—I know too! I mean, I—*feel* it—all ahead! You are—beaten—beaten!”

With a laugh he turned to old Fritz.

“I tell you it’s sure! This slump is only a bluff. The big Bulls are only waiting. If I hold on—just one hour—it will go up again—with a rush. It’s sure!”



A moment he glared in silence.

"Well, then," he cried, "if you *will* be fools—I'll win in spite of you! If you won't loan me *your* money—give me back *mine*! Do you hear? The money I loaned you—mine—mine!"

Old Fritz had stood motionless—watching him.

"Yes," he said, "you shall haf—all ve got—it ees yours!—I vill go mit you to de bank."

She heard them go out together.

For hours she sat staring into the fire. She felt never a throb of hope—or even suspense. She was so sure that all was ended.

How clear her plan was becoming.

She hardly looked at Jim when he came in at dusk and sank into a chair.

Fritz was still out.

She sat now sewing, now staring into the fire.

Jim never moved. He had settled back, and he gazed at nothing. Only once he seemed to notice the paper in his hand; he unfolded it; glanced at it—more figures. He laughed and tossed it away.

As the room grew dark the glow from the coals grew brighter. More and more Gretchen stared into the fire; at last she stopped sewing altogether and began steadily thinking.

And now the last bit of the dull dazed feeling was gone.

She rose quietly and moved about in the kitchen, and found relief in the work and prolonged it, and cooked a delicious little supper.

But Jim would eat nothing; he only drank half a cup of tea, and then settled back as before.

She watched him.

"Did it—*all* go?"

He nodded. She said nothing.

"I'm glad of that," she was thinking. "He will never—go there again."

\* \* \* \* \*

This time she only shrank a little when she saw Dago Joe in the doorway.

Jim saw him too—with a nervous irritable start, and jumped up and said sharply:

"I can't pay you. It's all gone!" And snatched up his hat and went out.

She watched Joe looking after Jim. Joe had not changed a bit. What dog-like devotion for Jim in his dull fierce eyes. She rose smiling.

"Won't you have some supper?"

As he came slowly toward the table, she suddenly wished she hadn't asked him, a wave of loathing swept over her face, and she closed her eyes

quickly to hide what she felt. But Joe saw and stopped.

"I no stay long—I hear Jim he lose an' go bust." The deep voice was hurt, dejected, sad. "I come—He think I wanta back my money."

"But—didn't you? I mean—why shouldn't you?"

Joe looked at her.

"I bringa some more."

Gretchen's eyes, that had been dry so long, suddenly glistened. Joe thought he understood, and he drew closer, speaking fiercely.

"You sorry for Jim because now he must taka my money. You think *my* money ain't good!—Say! De man in de 'Rip'—is *his* money good? No!—De men in saloons—de Tammany men—de Skinner—de big men on Wall Street—is *deir* money good? No!—All steal—lika me! You hear? All—lika me!"

She nodded and smiled slightly—still gazing up into his eyes. He drew closer and his voice softened.

"I wanta de money—only for Jim. If I'm bad, if I'm drunk, if I'm sick; if I steal, if I go in de jail, if I die—it is nothing. So long Jim singa de song—so glad, so big, so fine—it is all."

His hand plunged into his ragged pocket and pulled out a thick roll of money, which he tossed on the tea-tray.

"*You* keepa de money for Jim—*you* keep—so he don't give it all into Wall Street—Now I go. Soon I come—I bring more."

He turned toward the door.

"No!"

Joe turned back.

"Why?"

As she stared, her eyes cleared and grew quiet.

"I guess you are right," she said. "You have as much right to help him—as any one."

Joe's dark face brightened.

"So you keepa de money? We helpa Jim! We save de voice! Me an' you!"

"Yes," she whispered, "you and me!"

Long after he had gone she still sat looking at the door.

How clear it was becoming!

## CHAPTER XVIII

"ISN'T THAT WORTH—ANYTHING?"

A STEP on the stairs.

She sprang up and listened; puckered her dry lips to whistle, failed and tried again. The glad little motif was hardly finished when old Fritz's answer came back up the stairs.

She ran out and leaned over the banister, talking gaily as he came slowly up. She talked on while she helped him off with his coat; she talked while she made him fresh tea and warmed up his supper.

Old Fritz kept watching her—bewildered.

"Gretchen!"

"Well? You solemn serious cross old daddy! Well?"

"Vot's de matter mit you? Has Jimmy—won?"

She laughed.

"No. Lost. Every cent. So now he can never gamble again!"

"Vell!" Fritz's eyes twinkled. "Vy are ve al-reatty so glad? All vot you an' me saved—ees

gone. Vere ees de joke? Tell me—so I haf also some fun."

"Dear old daddy!" She hugged him. "*You have* money. Lots of it!"

"Vot?"

The piece of toast in his hand dropped to the floor.

"Listen."

She snuggled down into the old chair beside him.

"To begin with—it's all a secret."

She stopped short. And when, after a long pause, old Fritz looked around at her face, he was startled by the black look of despair.

"Vell! Gretchen!"

Her face cleared.

"Nothing. I was only thinking of Jim. But daddy"—she spoke slowly and very low, with an effort—"it's all right now. You will be—so safe and happy—all your life. And—Jimmy's voice is—saved and he will—never gamble—never! Isn't that worth—anything?" Her voice rose fiercely. "Isn't it—daddy—isn't it?—Well—this—secret will do it all!—You'll leave this secret to me—won't you? You trust me? You know I will—always do—only what I—think is right?"

"Mein baby." He drew her in closer. "How can

you effer do somet'ing bad?—But vy not tell me? Vy am I here but shoost to help you? Maybe you make a mistake. You are alreatty so young."

"No," she whispered, "I'm not so young. Besides—there is nothing in this secret I could make a mistake on—nothing. I'm so, so sure. It's only this—The best—friend—we have in the world—has sent us money—and he will send a great deal more."

Old Fritz's eyes clouded.

"Who? Und how can ve take? How ve pay back?"

"Yes, I knew you would say just that. But we never need pay this friend back, because *he* is only paying *you* back for what you did long ago."

She smiled up at him tenderly.

"Daddy—why do you go every Sunday to the big library and read the Berlin papers? Don't you always read about that famous opera enor? Don't you follow all he does just as if he were your son? And isn't he? Who found his voice? Who trained it first? Who loaned him money? Who got him friends? Who had him sent to Germany? Who saved this wonderful voice for the world? You! You! You!"

She watched Fritz's eyes grow radiant, shining

down into the fire. She tried to go on, but failed. Then she shut her eyes, and with an effort she whispered:

"So now—he—pays you back!"

"Gretchen!—How? Vere ees de letter? Let me hear vot he says—how he feels, how he remembers, how he ees! Quick—de letter!"

"I can't!—Not yet!—That's the secret!—You see——" Again she stopped and her face grew white with the struggle, but Fritz saw nothing. "He said I must burn the letter—because he didn't want you to know who sent the money—That was the secret I tried to keep—But he *will* write you soon—as though he were not sending the money at all—Do you see?"

She watched him anxiously.

His eyes glistened. His voice was low and broken.

"Ach—how—how goot it feels. You t'ink all de vorld ees bad—all de fight, de steal, de gamble, de race—shoost for money. You t'ink you haf been—all your life a fool. You feel so bad. But along comes a friend, und now—quick you know—you haf been no fool—but right!—You see how men—are brudders still! How goot—how goot it feels!"



What a joyous evening for Fritz, gazing at wonderful pictures down in the coals, talking on and on to Gretchen, telling all the little past scenes and memories of this voice he had saved to the world, forgetting the money and all the present relief, only dreaming his old dream—that all men are brothers.

And when he had told it all, he took his old fiddle and hugged it, and put the whole vision to music.

Gretchen played for him, softly—looking up. And now in her eyes was no fear or doubt, but only love—deep and protecting.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE NEXT THREE MONTHS

**F**OR many days Jim was broken, humbled, silent—thoroughly ashamed.

When Gretchen showed him the letter (typewritten) from Berlin—bidding Fritz use the money not only for himself but also to save and raise some other struggling young voice, Jim looked away and said huskily:

“Find some fellow who deserves it. I tell you, I’m bad—through and through!”

But when at last she did make him go back to his teacher, he suddenly roused and worked desperately hard.

Those were anxious weeks.

The voice was strange and rough and thick. The teacher gave Jim the queerest exercises, the strictest directions about food and fresh air and sleep. And Jim followed them all to the letter.

But the voice barely improved at all; sometimes it seemed even worse—while the weeks dragged by.

Her steady confidence nerved him to struggle on. Though at first the voice grew twice as harsh, just because she was there, though at first he would watch her face and his eyes would twinkle with pain when the harsh notes struck her ear—this all changed. For she seemed never to hear the bad in his voice, but only the pure and the true.

At last the roughness began to go. And then came the new. And as it came, she would look up with her eyes shining into his. And at such times it was wonderful how much feeling he could put into a bare voice exercise.

It was at just such a time that something tremendous happened.

It was at the end of the half hour, in the old twilight time, with Fritz away and only the wise old fire to watch them. For three days they had worked on a particularly wretched exercise to bring out a certain tone of the voice. Jim's voice had had this very tone so rich and glorious long ago; it was only the more exasperating now to try and try and miss it. It simply wouldn't come. Jim laughed his vexation, took a turn round the room, knocked over a chair and came back.

"Now," he remarked, quietly, "this time or bust!"

Gretchen looked up.

"Jimmy—don't you dare to bust!"

Slowly the voice sank down toward the awful low note, Gretchen bending closer over her keys, Jim gripping the back of her chair. Suddenly she felt him shake the chair hard, his head went back; she stopped—breathless. Down, down, down went the voice!—He got it! And held it and made it swell close—deeper, fuller, richer!

And when she turned her head, his strong broad face and black flashing eyes were so like the voice, so full of new life—that——

"Jimmy!" at last, in a stifled whisper. "Don't you—don't you dare to stop!"

And Jim didn't stop, but words did. It might have been minutes or hours or years.

The next morning Jim asked the teacher if he might begin on a simple song. And the teacher, who had been absolutely mystified by the way Jim's voice had acted in the last few weeks and especially that morning—threw up his hands and consented.

"I know nothing!" he cried. "Your voice improves without sense or reason. You don't deserve it."

Gretchen chose the first song, and after that life grew so happy that Time, in his jealous old fashion,

whirled days and weeks and months all into a jumble.

Tough fiendish old exercises—famous ones used by teachers all over the world, exasperating, causing the tearing of hair and long strings of curses, robbing anxious young singers of sleep and appetite, making them cross and gloomy and irritable—in short—works of the Devil! But how Jim and Gretchen tackled them, one by one, and made swift or slow work—but always happy work of them all. What fun it is for two people—young and of opposite sexes, to unite and snap their fingers at the Devil's half of the universe.

More money came from Berlin. And in one of the great singer's letters (always typewritten) he told how glad he was to hear about Jim. He wanted Jim to be free from all labor and care and just give all his strength to the voice. What a strangely kind and thoughtful person for one so far away.

Old Fritz was radiant. He fiddled day and night with Gretchen or played sly quiet little obligatos all by himself when Jim was with her singing; he gave lessons free to three ambitious violinists, aged nine and eleven and twelve, whose embryo genius he had heard through open tenement windows near by; he went to his old Third Avenue

haunt for his afternoon stein of beer; he bought a new tie—large and soft and black; and he had his long white hair cut—just a little; he bought quaint portraits of his favorite German composers; he brought apples home to be roasted; he eagerly scanned the Berlin reviews for accounts of his protégé's singing; he went to Jim's teacher, who said things about Jim's progress that made Fritz stop for an extra stein on his way home. Fritz beamed on the world, trusted everybody, loved Gretchen and Jim, and was sure that the voice would "go up—vay up" into the "World of Big Beauties." In short—old Fritz was natural.

He worked no more. His copy work was all taken now by Jim, who did it in half the time and made twice as many mistakes—which Fritz corrected.

This extra money Jim used on flowers. His old habits came back and grew swiftly; it began with a huge dewy mass of sweet peas—white and the faintest shade of pink—brought in triumphantly as a surprise one delicious fresh morning in May. He made her pin them all on, and took her off for one of their old-time boat rides down the bay.—

And the stars *may* have been always just as mysterious as they were that night, the millions of har-

bor lights as gay, the dark places in the waves as wonderful, the deep voice of the bell-buoy as solemn; but to Gretchen and Jim they were all brand new—ininitely more beautiful, mysterious.

And 'way out on the bow he put it all to music.

\* \* \* \* \*

All this was the bright shining surface of those swift three months.

Gretchen's secret throbbed deep below.

## CHAPTER XX

### DAGO JOE AND GRETCHEN

**I**T was the old mysterious hour; the lamp had not been lit, for it was an old song and she knew the accompaniment. A song so old and simple that as he sang it again and again, its own words seemed to slip away, and Jim was up in the "World of Big Beauties"—just talking to Gretchen.

His voice sank lower, and now he could feel her responding, so eager, so thrilling with hope, so close—that every one he had ever known seemed suddenly far away and strange and hard. The world felt suddenly breathless. For the world's richest moment had come.

Only for a moment.

Her chords suddenly stopped. Jim bent closer in the darkness and saw her face turned to the door. He looked around.

In the open doorway, gazing into the darkness,



listening, stood Dago Joe. The light from the gas-jet on the landing fell on his shaggy hair, his square face and his rags, covering all with bright lights and black shadows. He leaned slightly forward—his big greenish eyes gleaming, absorbed, forgetting all his life.

Jim felt her hand clutch his arm.

“Joe!”

At Jim’s cry Joe started and turned away, and a moment later they stood face to face on the landing. Jim’s eyes were bewildered and startled; in Joe’s eyes the light died slowly out.

“Good night, Jim.”

He turned slowly away.

“Don’t go!—What’s wrong?”

But Joe only looked back a moment and then started down the stairs. Jim heard him stumble twice, the street door banged below.

He went back into the darkness. He could see still at the piano a blurr of white—motionless.

When he took her in his arms she trembled violently and tried to draw away, but he held her tighter.

“Gretchen!” he whispered. “What has he done?—Gretchen!—Joe will never do us harm—only good. He makes me ashamed, I do so little for

him—and he would do anything for me—anything!”

“Yes,” she whispered, “anything.”

“Then what is it? The money from Berlin—has that stopped coming? If it has—tell me and we’ll just wait for it together. And so we won’t worry, and even if it don’t come at all we can get along somehow. Is that it?”

“No—The money is coming—It must come!—So it will.”

“Gretchen—I want to know every bad thing that comes into your life, I want you close—close like you were when I was singing—so close we can feel each other feel—so close always. Don’t let’s ever have any bad times like this between. You want that—don’t you?”

There was a long silence. He could feel her trembling stop.

“Yes,” she whispered at last. “That’s just it—that’s the only thing I shall ever want—in all my life—and—it seems as if I—never wanted anything else. But, oh Jimmy! Can we? Can we? In your song—just now—you tried to—lift me with you. And—I tried! But—you don’t know all that I am! Can I come? Can I?”

“You serious little sweetheart. *Don’t* I know all

that you are? Who made all the good there is in me? Who got me dreaming of life ahead—of songs—all songs—without one false note—all true!—Songs that are just like you. Why, that's just why I love you—because you are true—without one false note—all true!"

"And I love you," how strangely quiet her voice was now, "not because you are true—not for what you are—but for what I know you want to be. And whether you are true or false to this—I will always love you. But you—you *will* be true! To the Big Beauties—true! You must—you must—you—no matter what happens to any one else!"

A long silence.

"Oh Jimmy!" she whispered, "I was so happy to-night—and now you have made me so strong again."

She pressed his hand to her cheek.

"So strong—even stronger than you think. I've just made a nice little plan—I must think it all out by myself. So sing—while I think."

And Jim sang softly while Gretchen lay back in the darkness, staring into the fire—thinking.

The next day she began working much harder.

He found her sewing long before breakfast, she was sewing when he went to his lesson and still

when he came back. He made her go out in the afternoon for a walk, but even this she cut short and came home and again began sewing at once; she even asked old Fritz to play while Jim sang.

So it was the next day and the next.

When Jim grew indignant she only laughed gaily and told him the extra work was for a young lady whose coming-out tea was late in November. Already it was the middle of the month, and as the time grew on, Gretchen worked still harder.

Then Jim growled:

"Isn't that infernal débutante girl *all* out yet?"

"Yes!" laughed Gretchen. "And she liked my work so well that now I'm helping two more of her friends to get ready."

"Why do *they* get all this without lifting a hand?" growled Jim. "Why do you get all the work and they all the fun?"

She turned quickly away and laughed unsteadily.

"Is work so bad? You cross stupid old Jimmy! If you only knew how good it feels to me just now to work like this—if you only knew!"

And growl as he would he could not deny that the work agreed with her. She seemed ten times stronger and younger and closer to him in the

weeks that followed. It was as though a shadow had vanished.

Even when the monthly money from Berlin arrived and was only one-third of its usual amount, she did not seem at all surprised or anxious; she only worked the harder.

Another month went by.

Again came the money from Berlin—*one-fourth* the regular amount!

What was to be done? Already Jim owed his teacher. He had redoubled his copy-work, but even this brought only half enough to pay for the lessons.

He had a long talk with Gretchen; he found her strangely unwilling to clear things up, but he made her do it, and they went over all the household expenses.

They found that the money from Berlin must all go into the food and fuel and rent, and even this would not be enough—unless——

“Why, of course!” laughed Jim. “How stupid of us! We forgot all the money *you’ve* been earning.”

Gretchen looked straight at him, and never had he seen her blue eyes so dull, so expressionless. Jim looked his surprise. Gretchen smiled.

"Wait—I'm thinking."

So she was—suddenly thinking hard.

"The ladies I work for haven't paid me yet—that's all," at last she said simply. "I'll work a month more, and then if the money from Berlin is so small again, I'll go and—collect all they owe me."

In the meantime they kept it from Fritz. They let him go on with his little comforts and saved on themselves; they bought no more flowers, and took no more autumn trips to the country; even the songs were omitted.

At first they laughed over it, working side by side, he on his copying, she on her embroidery; they raced each other—a big sheet of music to a soft little linen handkerchief.

But little by little they grew silent.

For work and save as they would, they could only fill out the household expenses; there was nothing left for Jim's lessons.

The lessons stopped. Jim worked harder and grew thinner and whiter each day.

What was to be done?

\* \* \* \* \*

It was long after midnight, and Jim had tossed in his bed for hours.

Now he leaped up and called himself a coward; he drew deep breaths of sparkling night air at the open window, half dressed, went out by the fire and again bent over his copying. He worked till his fingers grew numb and his head was throbbing. Only now and then he stopped—to listen. He thought he heard Gretchen awake and tossing.

At last she too came out in her wrapper; and in her hand was a pile of sewing.

Startled—they looked at each other a moment, and laughed softly.

But more and more unsteady grew Gretchen's laugh—almost hysterical, till it stopped and she stood staring down into the coals, with her head in her hands on the mantel.

"It *was* foolish of me to try." She spoke without turning. Her voice was hard. "To try work. What can *we* do just by working?—Just by—working."

Jim came to the fire and put his arm around her shoulders, but when he touched her hand he started; it was moist and cold.

"But we *will* work," he whispered. "We must. I mean *I* must. You must go easier—you've been looking too tired—little sweetheart—too tired—you must slow down. And I——"

He fell silent a long time, slowly drawing his arm round her tighter.

"There's no other way," he said suddenly. "I must go back to the 'Rip.' "

Gretchen trembled, but grew quiet and then laughed.

"How stupid you are!"

Again that same old protecting note was in her voice. Whatever struggle she had had was ended.

"You never think of all the money that's coming from my ladies—my dear, dear friends!"

She kissed him softly.

"Everything will be right—Jimmy—very soon."

Three nights later she showed him a thick roll of crisp bank notes—a hundred and twenty dollars!

"I've been collecting," she said. "Now you can have back the Berlin money we had to use at home. It's all yours now—so go back and have lessons every day."

She forced a smile.

"And how do we know? Perhaps the next money from Berlin may be as much as it used to be. So then we can have everything we want. And we'll stop this foolish working!"

Sure enough—the next money was even more than it had ever been.



What a relief it was for Jim. He threw himself into his singing twice as hard as before. He felt twice as strong.

And Gretchen too had changed.

They had all their country tramps and the flowers, and the songs in the room at twilight.

\* \* \* \* \*

Dago Joe came often to listen.

He never sat down, but stood with his old slouch hat in his hand and his head sunk in his soft red handkerchief.

Never *by word* did he remind Jim of the old promise that they two should grow famous together, but often at the end of a song he would break out, describing how he had been working in the little theatre whole nights by himself.

"I hear de song in my head! I listen—I feel! I find de best beauty—I maka de chords finer—finer dan hers!" with an impatient nod towards Gretchen. "Let me play—now you sing—I show!"

He crowded into her place. And when Jim sang Joe played these chords he had made—less coarse, more soft and rich, but somehow wilder and sadder than ever before. He clothed Jim's "big glad songs" in sombre blacks and deep rich reds; under it all was the jerk and the throb of the street.

And always when he sang with Joe, Jim felt as though he were singing again in saloons or the "Rip," and in his song the new beauties would not come out.

At first Joe would not notice this and would fiercely urge Jim to song after song. But when slowly his ears caught the emptiness in the voice, when he played more passionately and the voice did not respond, then his music would break and die away in discords.

And Joe would go sadly away.

Once when he had gone and Gretchen was playing again, this same passionate longing and fear rose up in *her* music, too.

Jim stopped her.

She kept looking at the music before her for a moment, and then she said gently:

"I'm only foolish to-night—so foolish—I was afraid I—might be dropped—like Joe."

Her hand behind her closed in his.

"It was foolish—wasn't it? Now I'm right."

And she played as though Joe had never come in.

\* \* \* \* \*

One morning, coming home earlier than usual, Jim heard Joe's voice inside, gruff and eager.

He went in, and as he looked from one to the

other, Joe jammed his hat over his eyes and went out.

Gretchen looked up.

"Take daddy to the opera to-night," she said, quietly. "I can't go. I have to do some—work—to-night—in the house of one of my lady—friends."

Suddenly she rose and went into the kitchen, with none of the humming songs that usually enlivened her work.

Jim bent over his copy work—bewildered, impatient and angry at her for always keeping from him this endless secret about Joe.

But then he felt her two hands over his eyes, and her warm cheek pressed against his.

"Jimmy! Sing to me! Sing better than you ever did before; sing how much you love me, how you'll never leave me, how nothing that can ever happen will make any difference! Sing to me! Jimmy—sing—sing!"

But at supper she was quiet as before.

When Jim and Fritz left her, she hardly looked up from her sewing.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Where are you going?"

Jim jumped up from his copy work. It was nightfall two weeks later.

Gretchen had put on her hat and coat in her room, had come quietly by him and was already at the door. Under her arm was a tightly rolled package.

"What have you there?" he asked.

"Sewing."

"You selfish little person. You look guilty and you ought to—going out after dark and not even giving me a chance."

"You—mustn't go!"

"Oh yes I must!" Jim was already half into his coat.

She held it.

"Jimmy—not this time."

"Oh Gretchen!—look what a glorious frosty night it is; we'll have a bully fast walk and come back by that flower place on Madison Square; I went by this morning and he has the most wonderful little soft white roses, a new kind——"

"No."

"I'll only buy two or three, give you my word! And what's the use of working all afternoon on this wretched stuff if I can't buy you that much? Be-

sides—it's long after dark. You *can't* go alone so late!"

"Jimmy. Not this time. Please."

Jim looked at her a moment and then slowly took off his coat.

She turned quickly and went out.

From the window he watched her go up the other side of the street, walking quickly out of the glare of a corner arc light into the shadow in the middle of the block. The shadow gradually deepened—like this secret that had made him each day more uneasy. Farther and farther in—she was almost out of sight.

Jim suddenly threw up the window and leaned out.

Down toward the next corner in the next glare of light was the black mouth of an alley. He watched to see her pass it safely. Nearer—nearer. He saw her slacken her steps as though afraid.

She started nervously back. A short figure had shot out of the alley.

A moment she stood motionless—then walked on. The figure went close beside her, and they seemed to be talking.

It was Dago Joe.

When Jim asked her about it that night, he saw her lip quiver, but the next instant she was smiling.

"Oh he was only—bothering me—about that horrible music of his!"

"It's time he stopped it!" said Jim, sharply.

All evening he kept glancing at her uneasily.

\* \* \* \* \*

Three days later, again coming home early, Jim saw Joe come out of the tenement and go down the street.

Jim followed.

Joe loitered slowly along.

But soon Jim grew suspicious and at last deeply excited. For although Joe was only slouching along slower than ever, carelessly, with his hands deep in his loose ragged pockets, Jim, who knew this neighborhood, could see that Joe with all his apparently careless gait was steering for the back door of a tumble-down shop on Park Row. It was the shop of a "fence."

A "fence" is a man who receives stolen goods.

When at last Joe having passed and repassed the door turned abruptly and went in, Jim waited about one minute, then approached, bending double

to keep below the door window, threw the door open and rushed in, just in time to see something bright flash into Joe's bulging coat-pocket.

When Joe saw Jim, all his cool carelessness dropped from him and he only stared stupidly.

The "fence" came out smiling, and asking Jim what he wanted.

"I want this!"

Jim plunged his hand in Joe's pocket and brought out a heavy gold hair brush. He looked at the initials—the same initials he had seen on the tiny handkerchiefs embroidered by Gretchen!

Jim looked at Joe.

Joe's eyes were still dazed. Slowly Joe's big dirty hand went up to his throat, and with one fierce jerk loosened the red handkerchief—as though he could not breathe.

"You come with me!" said Jim, between his teeth.

Joe followed. Jim walked steadily faster, at times he almost ran.

As Joe followed blindly and unsteadily, his eyes seemed slowly clearing. He was thinking desperately hard.

When they reached the room, Joe scowled threateningly at Gretchen, snatched the brush from Jim's

hand, and as Jim's eyes turned on him—he sneered:

“Why you bringa me here? What can *she* know?” He turned and laughed at Gretchen. “Good—always so good—de little fool! How can *she* know?”

Jim gripped the edge of the table.

“Well? Then how did you get it?”

Joe laughed again—a strange loud laugh; he drew a newspaper from his inner pocket, thrust it in Jim's face and pointed to a column headed “Burglary on Washington Square!”

Jim bent under the lamp and read slowly, stopping now and then to look at Gretchen, each time as though dreading what he might see any instant in her face.

Gretchen's face was white and drawn, she stared straight past Jim into the shadow.

In the shadow stood Dago Joe holding her eyes desperately with his.

Only when Jim finished and turned around did she break from Joe's glare.

“Jimmy!” she cried. “Listen! I——”

But Joe stepped in between them.

“She's a fool!” he cried fiercely. “She know nothing—you hear?—Nothing! Look!” He struck the paper—“Dis house—she been dere to



work many times. I ask, an' she tella me all I need—she don't never think why I wanta know—she tella me all about de house—so last night I come wid my gang—we bust in—we steal! Ah! You—fool!" He sneered again in Gretchen's face. "Fool—fool—fool!"

Under all his furious sneers she could feel him imploring her to keep quiet. Weak and quivering, she leaned back against the mantel.

But Jim's eyes shone with relief.

Joe saw this and smiled bitterly.

"Well," he cried, "what you do now? De police?"

"No!" cried Gretchen. "No," she whispered, "not the police!"

"No," said Jim, "I can't do that. You'll have to—get the other things you took—all—all in this list," he pointed to the newspaper and stopped to think. "Bring 'em all here so I can see 'em—we'll pack 'em and send 'em back—by express. That's all."

Joe walked slowly out. Outside the door he turned.

Jim was on his knees by Gretchen's chair.

"Gretchen!" he whispered. "For a minute—just for a minute I thought—oh—God!—

Gretchen! Say you forgive me! I'll never think it again—never—never!"

But Gretchen only stared over Jim's head at Joe in the doorway. Her eyes were full of pain and fear, and shame and deep reverence.

## CHAPTER XXI

"THIS WILL BE THE LAST!"

**J**OE had brought back the stolen goods, one by one, and Jim had checked off the whole list and packed them and sent them back to the house on Washington Square.

It was three days later—in the evening.

"Jimmy," she spoke without looking up from her sewing. "Has your teacher ever said how much longer it will be before you earn money by your voice?"

Jim looked up from his music.

"If I wait for recitals and work like that, it means about a year more."

"I thought so. And your teacher—he wouldn't give you lessons for nothing?"

Jim glanced at her impatiently.

"Why Gretchen—how many others like me do you think he has? He turns away over a hundred pupils a year. I'm lucky to be there at all. But—why are you asking all this?"

"Because," said Gretchen slowly—still sewing, "the money from Berlin hasn't come."

Jim laughed.

"Well—suppose it hasn't. It was only due three days ago. Give it time. It'll come all right."

Gretchen was silent—sewing harder.

She reached out for some more thread.

"Yes," she said very quietly, "it must come—of course."

Again silence.

Jim sat over his copying, trying to work, but glancing at her every few minutes. He could see she wanted to tell him the thing in her mind. She was smiling to herself, twice she started to speak, but stopped.

At last he leaned over.

"Come on—what's the joke?"

She looked up at him uncertainly.

"Why yes," she said, "why not? Jimmy—what do you think? Those people at the house Joe broke into—they suspected *me* of the *stealing*."

"What?"

At Jim's low tense voice the laugh in her eyes vanished.

"Don't—Jimmy—don't worry. They're stupid fools—all of them. Even if I were a thief *they*

could never catch me. You ought to have heard their questions, they were so afraid of hurting my feelings—because I was such a ‘good honest girl.’ ”

\* \* \* \* \*

The next evening she had completely changed.

She sat sewing fast, her face bent far over. But Jim could see, in glimpses, how intense and excited was the look in her eyes—big and round to-night. They kept flashing and snapping, with joyous angry confidence, seeing something definite and close and sure, forgetting all else.

“And this will be the last!” she said suddenly—thinking aloud.

“What will?”

Jim had sprung up from his chair. So had Gretchen. Each looked so startled that as they stood watching each other they burst out laughing.

“Last—what?” asked Jim greatly relieved. “Sewing?”

“Of course!” cried Gretchen. “How clever you are!”

She held up a rich heavy napkin on which she had been embroidering initials.

“This is the last thing I’ll ever sew for any of them! It’s for Miss Louise!—Oh! What do you think? I forgot to tell you!—She’s going to be

married—to-morrow! And you ought to see the presents, they fill four rooms, silver and gold, dishes, tea-pots, pictures, things from Paris, Italy, Dresden—Oh all the best things from all the best places!"

Jim's face darkened.

"What has *she* ever done for all this?"

Gretchen looked up slowly.

"It does seem a waste—doesn't it? She's only a child—a spoiled child. She's kind enough; she trusts me—she lets me go through the present rooms—all by myself. But——" she bent over her work. "What good—do so *many* things do her? Why—does she need—*three*—gold tea-pots?"

She gave a quick laugh.

"But what do I care for all that?—Jimmy! Don't you dare to look so black! Besides——" her voice sank to low mock-solemn tones, "the money from Berlin—arrives—to-morrow!—Wait!—Listen!—The letter came to-day. He says that from now on he will stop sending money each month, but instead he will send—once for all—so much money—Oh Jimmy, so much! And all at once, to be invested and kept for us by a lawyer here. I am to see the lawyer to-morrow. You

remember, he never wanted daddy to know about the money, so now in the letter he makes me promise to go to the lawyer alone—to-morrow—after-noon! And after that we'll be so safe—don't you see—until your voice earns all we need!"

She turned her face to his and looked at him in the strangest eager way.

"So safe," she said—very low—smiling. "Isn't that worth—anything?"

\* \* \* \* \*

Long after old Fritz had gone to bed, she lay in the big chair—in Jim's arms, gazing at pictures, deep in the coals.

She was very quiet.

Only now and then she shivered slightly.

To-morrow.

## CHAPTER XXII

“YOU WILL NEVER GIVE UP—IF YOU LOVE ME”

**T**ICK-TICK. Tick-tick.

Jim kept glancing up from his work at the old brown clock on the mantel. It was nearly four o'clock the next day, and still she had not come back.

Tick-tick. Tick-tick.

The shadows crept up from the corners of the room—darker and darker.

The clock struck four.

Jim started, glanced up uneasily, and went on working.

The shadows crept silently on. Again and again he glanced round, shook them off impatiently, and went on working. He never thought of lighting the lamp, but strained his eyes, bending closer, fighting the shadows away. Once he laughed—but stopped abruptly and went on working.

A whistle—gay and high and tremulous, floated



up the stairs. A wave of relief swept over Jim; he jumped up and ran out to the landing and leaned over as old Fritz came up.

"Vell! Vere ees Gretchen?" asked Fritz, puffing up the last flight.

"Out—but she'll be back soon!"

Jim was suddenly easy and joyous. Of course she would, what a fool he had been! He helped Fritz light the lamp, and at once the soft yellow light melted the shadows away.

But when the clock struck five, the worries rose again. Jim laughed them down. They rose faster!

At last old Fritz took out his fiddle, fondled it awhile and then tucked it under his chin.

\* \* \* \* \*

At that moment, up the stairs came heavy stumbling steps.

Jim rose slowly—listening.

"It's Joe!" he cried sharply.

"Well?" he asked—running out. "What's wrong?"

"No! Not you!" panted Joe, trying to squeeze by.

But Jim jammed him against the door and asked, in a whisper:

"Is this about—Gretchen?"

Joe nodded. His big blood-shot eyes glared up, he gave a short reckless excited laugh, and then all the jealousy of years flamed in his eyes.

"Caught!" he cried. "*She*—so good—so nice! *She*—caught!"

Jim's fist flashed back and swung and struck, and Joe reeled against the wall.

"Vot ees it? Quick!" cried old Fritz. "Vot you mean?"

"She steal." Joe's voice now was low. "She steal—an' she be—sent to jail. Lika—me!—a thief—lika me!"

Jim snatched up his hat and turned to Joe.

"Where is she?"

"No!" Joe smiled triumphantly. "No! Not you!"

"What do you mean?"

"She say—if you love her—you show now—you do as she ask—you wait here."

He turned to Fritz.

"*You* she want. She want *you* come quick—wid me."

Old Fritz was standing straight and stiff. One hand at his side gripped the neck of the fiddle, the other held Gretchen's work-bag. His white head

was thrown back and his little blue eyes gleamed proudly.

"Caught!" His voice was harsh and vibrating with sudden strength. "By lies! You hear?—So! Remember—by lies—Ve must be strong—ve must be quick und careful—und also wise—all at once! So!"

He spoke faster—turning to Joe.

"Caught? Yes—so you say, und I believe you—you are mein friend—you vill help me—I can see it—so already I believe you. Remember! Caught—by lies! She ees goot—true—pure—so fine—so beauty—so young—so sweet! Caught by lies—lies—lies! Come—ve must be quick—wise—strong!"

He struggled into his overcoat, then paused—bewildered, with his fiddle in one hand and Gretchen's bag in the other. He looked at the fiddle and put it down, he looked at the work-bag and then solemnly up at Joe.

"Maybe—she wants—de bag alreatty?"

Joe impatiently shook his head.

"Vell! Shoost as you say!" Fritz smiled eagerly. "Shoost as you say!"

He put down the bag and took Joe's arm and started out. At the door he turned to Jim.

"Lies!" smiled Fritz. "Caught by lies!"

He turned—blindly, struck against the doorway—smiled—and went out.

Jim heard their quick steps down the stairs, the door slammed, and Jim fell back in his chair.

\* \* \* \* \*

Tick-tick. Tick-tick.

The shadows—darker, ever darker, crept in around him.

He looked impatiently at the lamp, it was suddenly dim and smoking. Why? Laboriously he thought it out. She must have forgotten to fill it.

"No wonder!" He drew a deep shivering breath and gripped the chair to stop the whirling. "No wonder!"

Now the room was almost dark, with only a faint red glimmer from the lamp. Vaguely he felt it there—the ruin of her life—ruin—all ruin! Her words came again.

"After to-morrow your voice will be safe—so safe. Isn't that worth anything?"

He repeated it many times, dully at first, but then with swiftly increasing bitterness as he saw all back through the months the slow secret sacrifice, the smashing of all her pure simple morality,

And why? Why? Back into the years behind, back into the throb and waste and gambling!

Suddenly through the window burst the blue hard glare from the street just lighted.

The street! How the memories rushed in and burned. How clear it all was in an instant! Jim sprang up with a low cry of agony.

"No! Wait!—It can't be—that!" he whispered. "Not—that?"

He stood rigid, trembling, cold.

Yes—that was it. Lucky Jim the Gambler—slowly settling down on her life—burning her up through the years. The street had crept from his blood into hers!

\* \* \* \* \*

It seemed as though heavy empty ages had gone by, when at last he heard the voice of old Fritz.

The voice was so strong and hard and vibrating that Jim looked up, bewildered.

Fritz stood before him.

"Mein child und me—togedder—we are a thief! Ve steal—to save your voice. Ve steal—and she ees caught—and now she go to prison away. Und she ask you—dot you—neffer see—her face—neffer!"

Silence.

"No!" Jim whispered—he stared imploringly up in the darkness. "No!—She—why, she couldn't have said that—she couldn't have."

He leaped up and seized the old man by the shoulders.

"She never said it! You lie—you know you lie! I can't live without her—do you hear? I can't—live!"

"I tell you true."

Fritz spoke very low; for an instant he seemed to hesitate, but then held to his plan.

"She vill neffer see you. To-morrow—she goes to—prison away. She says you haf burned up all her life. She says if you haf any love in your heart—you show dot love now—you keep away."

His voice broke. He put his arm around Jim's neck.

"But you must not die—you must live!—Ve must live so ve safe her life!—Your voice—it ees *her* voice now!—You vill vork hard, you vill safe dot voice. Und maybe—some day she vill change. Her love for you vill come back."

His voice rose deep and ringing again.

"So! Ve must live—be strong—be brave—be true!"

Jim squeezed both Fritz's hands slowly tighter.

"Yes," he said at last. "We will do—all that—all."

A dull silence.

"She's—not in jail?"

"No—Miss Louise was kind. No policemen. She ees dere—in a room."

"That's good."

Jim stood staring into Fritz's eyes, trying to remember something.

"Oh yes," he smiled. "You must be tired."

He spoke in a dull monotone.

"Over here—that's right—wait—a pillow—now—good."

He went into the kitchen and started the tea-pot, came back and coaxed up the fire in the grate, brought tea and bread and butter and put it on the little table in front of Fritz's chair.

Fritz and Jim looked hopelessly at the pot and the cup and the bread.

At last Fritz glanced up and smiled and drew Jim's hand down into his, and they stared into the fire.

Jim stood there a long time, only now and then squeezing Fritz's hands slowly tighter.

The clock struck eleven.

Jim started nervously and began walking the room.

Once he glanced at old Fritz, stopped and listened, and stole behind the chair. Fritz's eyes were closed.

"Asleep?"

Old Fritz sprang up.

"She und me togedder—togedder a thief! Fraulein Louisa—let me show you—how it ees—vy she——" he fell back, breathing hard.

Jim leaned over close and tried to lift him.

"Come to bed," he whispered, "you—you are to—see her—to-morrow. You must sleep now—get strong. Come."

"No!" the old voice was loud again. "I am not tired, und neffer vill I be—till she gets back her life alreatty again. Neffer tired! I only think—vot I say—vot I do!"

His head sank again on his breast and he looked again into the coals, as though searching the wise old fire for aid.

"Jimmy," he said at last—speaking low, "I haf told you? You understand? Vot you must do?"

"Yes," Jim whispered, "I understand. I will do it."

He began walking again.



At midnight he took his hat and went out, and for hours he walked down along the North River docks, by the flower stalls that were now closed and empty.

When he came back he began to write at the table. Again and again he tore up what he had written, and when at last he had written what he wanted, he read it slowly many times to make sure.

He went softly to the big chair.

Old Fritz sat with his head on his breast as before, gripping the brown arms of the chair till the veins on his wrinkled hands stood out big and blue; and his eyes were still searching the coals.

Jim laid the letter in Fritz's lap.

Fritz roused sharply, took the letter and read it slowly.

"You'll take it to her?" asked Jim, quietly. "It isn't much—is it? Just to try? She might feel like doing it—she might. You know that. So take it—won't you?"

Fritz bent as if reading closer.

"You know she might!" Jim whispered fiercely. "Love like hers *can't* be killed so quick! And if there's any left I want it! I want her to say I can wait for her, work for her, be ready with the voice—*her* voice—and life and everything—when she

comes out. She might say it! You know she might! Will you take it?"

"Yes."

Fritz looked up—his eyes dry as before.

Jim went out again and walked the streets until morning. And when he came back Fritz was gone.

Late that afternoon Fritz came back and gave him a paper on which these words had been written in a firm steady hand:

\* \* \* \* \*

"When you think—you will understand. You have made my whole life black—I have lost all I believed in. If you could see me as I am you would see what you have done—I am all changed—you would not love me now. I do not love you. I can never love you. You must never see me again.

"But I love your voice. And if you love me still you will work on your voice as you have never worked before—you will make the voice do all we ever dreamed—you will work—you will make new strong friends who will help you—you will make yourself live again a full rich life with friends and gladness and beauty. For if you do not live so—then you cannot sing. The voice must not be gloomy and weak. You must make it glad and

pure and rich and always strong. You must live—you must work—you must sing.

“You will never give up—if you love me.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Jim read it many times, his black eyes slowly clearing, his broad face setting hard.

At last he put it away and stood there a moment staring at Fritz, but seeing nothing.

Suddenly he smiled.

“No—she doesn’t mean this. She—can’t feel like this. I never love her? She never love me? No.”

The smile slowly faded from his lips.

“I say she can’t!” he cried—leaping up. “Do you hear? She can’t! There’s something hidden! What is it? You must know—and you—won’t lie to me at a time like this—you can’t! What is it?”

Fritz looked down for a moment and then his eyes met Jim’s quietly.

“Her mind ees made up. She vill neffer see you—neffer.”

Jim seized his hat and started out.

“Jimmy! Vere you go?”

“To find out the truth—from Dago Joe!”

## CHAPTER XXIII

"A THIEF LIKA ME! SHE HATE YOU!"

**I**N the little Italian theatre one yellow gas-jet still flared, down by the stage. And under it, with his head in his arms on the keys of the old low piano, sat the Italian.

"Joe!"

At Jim's sharp cry Joe sprang up—quivering, then sank back on the stool, with his back to the keys and his eyes fixed on Jim, who came quickly down the aisle.

Jim stopped, and they looked at each other in silence.

"Joe," said Jim, at last, trying to speak low, though his voice shook with suspense, "you and me have—always been chums!—Haven't we?"

Joe nodded—licking his thick dry lips.

"Then Joe—tell me—everything. Don't leave a thing out—from the beginning."

"Yes," said Joe, his voice sounding strange and hoarse, "I tell you—from de begin."

He turned and pressed his big hands slowly down

on the keys and stared at them; and drew a long deep breath.

"When me an' you—was kids—we made a plan."

"Leave it out!" cried Jim. "All that! Can't you see it's only *her* I want to hear about?"

"Only—*her*."

Joe spoke the last word between his teeth.

"But I—I wanta tell—about *me*!—Me an' you we—made a plan. You say to me—'We will go all our lives—I sing—you play.' Jest you an' me!—So—we begin."

He looked up fiercely.

"Say! Did I play good? Did I work hard—right here in dis place? Did I wanta you sing only good—only glad, glad beauty? Did I learn you de big glad songs—from my countree?"

He stopped—breathing hard—and went on slowly:

"De old Dutch—he come. You go wid him—you sing de sleepy song—no fire—only Dutch. I watch—I listen—I see you lova him hard. But do I care? No! I see you leave de dice—you getta strong—an' I was glad!

"De man at de 'Rip'—he come. He taka de voice in his sweatshop. He sweat de voice! I hear!

De voice get bad—I tella you to stop—he hear—I lose my job—I come outside—I listen! De voice—get worse—worse—worse—go all to hell!—An' so I burn—de sweatshop."

A moment he was silent—his eyes fixed on the keys. Then he went on—huskily and low:

"But—it will not burn enough!—Some years go by. De man he come again—so soft—so smooth—so kind. He catch de voice—I don't know how. I only hear—de voice at first go up so fine—so big—an' I was glad. De wise smooth man he smile. Again he burn de voice—so slow—so kind! I don't know how. I only hear de voice come down—down—down!

"An' I—what I do? I must get money quick. I steal—I giva you—but—no good. De man wid his sweatshop put fire in your voice—de fire sink into your soul. You go to Wall Street—play big dice—play—play—de money go.

"What can I do? I steal again—I bring de money—to her—so you won't spend.

"She think my money bad because I steal! Bad? Bad when it save de voice?

"But soon I show. She see. She take. A week go by.

"An' now—she steal too. She bring me what

*she* steal—I sell. She steal again—I sell. You stop de dice—you stop de ‘Rip’—de voice get well! Why was it bad? Why?”

Joe suddenly rose and faced Jim and spoke fast.

“Den—you see me sell what *she* steal—you bring me—to her—she get scare—she come soon to me—she say she try one more *big* steal—so *big* she get all de money she need—so she can stop. She try—de big wedding—she say if she win she come quick to me in de alley so near. If she not come I know she is caught—an’ den I must come to you—I must get de old man—but I maka you stay away.”

Jim leaned closer and gripped Joe’s ragged shoulders.

“Why?” he cried. “Why did she want me to stay away? Why? She must have said!”

Joe’s big face set hard and his voice again was low and husky.

“If she—still lova you—will you wait? An’ when she comes out—will you sing an’ *she* play? So?”

In Joe’s dull eyes the jealousy blazed again.

“You know I will.” Jim’s voice shook. “It’s all my life. So—if she did—if she did say—you’ll tell—you won’t hide it. Joe—We’ve always been

chums—you've done everything for me—you'd give your life if I needed it—you would!—But this is more than all—all my life. You won't steal it—you'll tell me."

Joe sprang back.

"No! I tella you only dis! She go now to jail for many year! A thief—lika me! She hate you—yes—hate you! She is gone! You see her now—never—never! You hear? Never!"

Jim took Joe's head in both his hands and bent it slowly up and searched Joe's eyes—which glared.

"Hate you!" Joe snarled. "Why? Because she's bad all through!"

He stopped abruptly.

There was a long silence. Jim's head sank.

Then Joe put his hand gently on Jim's shoulder, and now his thick voice was very low and humble.

"Jim."

He waited in vain for a sign of response.

"Jim—You must sing—Jim—sing hard. An' I? Shall I play?"

Still no answer.

"Jim—Soon you will not burn any more in de head. I know—de mens in my countree—dey love—dey lose—dey burn inside. But—so soon—dey get all well—all glad again! Jim—you must sing.



De voice—we make him go up—into big glad songs!—Me an' you?—Jim?—You sing? I play?—Jim?"

Jim shook off the hand and turned away.

"No." His voice was old and empty. "You and me can—never sing together."

Joe sprang forward, gripping Jim's arm.

"Why?" he whispered.

"Because—you—you've always tried to do me good. But—you've done only—bad. You've killed her—so now you've—killed me too!—I'll sing because—she wants it. I'll try to sing better than any man has—ever sung. Because it's—*her* voice. But I can never sing—with you. I can never see you after this.

"You'll—think this over. You'll see why I can't. You'll—never—come near me—again!—Good-by Joe—Quit stealing!—It can do a lot of—harm!—Good-by!"

Jim suddenly turned back and took Joe's hand and wrung it hard.

"Good-by! Joe! Good-by!" he whispered.

He turned and went slowly up the narrow aisle.

And Joe—plunging his shaggy head down on his elbows over the keys, sat motionless all night.

Beginning to think it over.

## CHAPTER XXIV

"I MYSELF WILL BE NOTHING. I WILL ONLY SING."

**A**T home, just before dawn, Jim wrote this letter:

"I will love you always. I will sing always as though you are listening. I will do everything I can think of to make the voice the best it could ever have been made even if you had loved me all my life. I will shut off everything in the world that might stop the voice. Because the voice is yours. I myself will be nothing. I will only sing. I will never write to you again. I will never ask you to see me. Good-by. I love you."

He wrote very slowly but without stopping.

He went to bed, his limbs ached and twitched from exhaustion, but he lay very quiet—thinking.

In two hours he rose and came out, tore open the envelope and sat with his letter and hers, now reading one and now the other. He read very carefully, stopping to read over each sentence many

times, as though to make sure he had left out nothing.

When he heard Fritz rising, he jumped up, went into the kitchen and made coffee and toast. It was the second meal since she had gone. The first had been tea and toast. Jim looked around, hopelessly, picked up a big chunk of cheese and put it on the tray.

When Fritz started to go, Jim gave him the letter.

When the old man was gone out, Jim sat looking into the fire.

At last he went to the piano and began slowly turning sheet after sheet of the old music, stopping over some pages a long time.

He seized his hat and went out; he went uptown to his teacher and said:

"I have no money now except what I make on copy work. I need all that to support an old man and myself. But I am strong; I can do the copying at night, and do other work in the daytime to pay for my lessons. You have rich friends who can give me a job. I will try anything."

The teacher was silent, watching Jim closely.

"I know about your trouble," he said at last,

speaking very low. "My boy—take care you don't burn up."

"I must work to sing."

"Yes—but you must work only on your voice. You will pay nothing to me for your lessons. I cannot tell you now, but you have friends who have heard of—what has happened, and they have arranged that you have lessons until you begin on recitals."

This surprising news Jim received with a look so dull that the teacher drew nearer and put his hand on Jim's shoulder.

"My boy—if you will only do as I say—you will sing in public one year from now. If you do as you are beginning to do, burn your life up by double work to forget your pain, then your voice will burn up too."

"No," said Jim. "My voice will never fail. You will be surprised how it will sound. I don't know who my friends are. I don't care. Please tell them their money will not be wasted."

The teacher looked at Jim in amazement. It seemed as though a different person were speaking.

\* \* \* \* \*

In the next few weeks, in the months of spring,

and through the long hot summer, Jim hardly left the old room.

He worked on his copying seven hours a day, old Fritz worked three hours, and between them they could just pay for rent and fuel and food.

When Fritz saw how hard Jim was working he suggested that they move to cheaper rooms, but Jim looked up with such sudden loneliness and agony in his eyes that Fritz never tried it again.

Then—watching Jim's shoulders bend and his coat hang looser on his body, old Fritz tried hard to take more of the copying himself; he increased to four hours a day.

Jim only worked the harder. When Fritz begged him to work less, when his teacher sternly warned him to work less, Jim smiled. He told them he had never felt so strong.

"If you don't believe it," he would say with a smile, "listen to my voice."

And surely in that resonant rich vibrating voice was no sign of weakness. Only deep wild sorrow, only the striving to live, only desperate gladness.

As Fritz watched Jim, so Jim watched Fritz—constantly and anxiously. Jim was always trying to cook the little German dainties she had made for her father. The little kitchen saw strange scenes,

a huge dark, young man in his shirt sleeves, his broad face gaunt and solemn, and his eyes eagerly fixed on a brand-new receipt book; it heard loud careless whistling, soft careful swearing, sudden cries of wrath, long looks of disappointment; and sometimes a voice discouraged, desperate, lonely—and reverent—whispering:

"Oh but she was a wonder!"

When he heard the old man tossing sleepless through the nights, Jim took him out for long evening walks. He watched him, listened to him, laughed with him, cooked for him—eagerly.

"Remember," he said—"you want to be in mighty fine shape when she—comes back to—live with you. She'll need some one—bad."

Old Fritz went to see her every Sunday morning. Jim never asked him where he went, only gave him money for railroad fare, if he needed it; but his care of the old man always rose as Sunday drew near. Once when Fritz caught a bad cold on Friday, Jim sat up all night trying to copy all the little things she had done when he himself had been sick, seven years before. And when Fritz begged him to go to bed, Jim only said:

"We're not risking a sick Sunday."

The breakfast Sunday morning was always a si-

lent meal, in spite of Jim's efforts to be gay and unconcerned. Fritz's old eyes would shine with expectancy, till he saw the hungry look in Jim's face, and then he would look away.

No message ever passed from Gretchen to Jim, or from Jim to Gretchen.

Except this: One spring morning, when Jim had gone to his lesson, Fritz noticed in Gretchen's little bedroom a fresh dewy cluster of sweet-peas. He went in, for the first time since the night when he had packed her things. The flowers stood in the middle of her little low bureau. The bureau was covered by a towel—fresh and spotlessly clean, but strangely crumpled as though something or other—starch possibly—had been forgotten in the washing. On the bed the sheets had the same clean crumpled appearance; the bed was freshly made for the night, but the pillow still had on its day covering. By the bed, on a low stand, was a candle—half burnt; some sewing that Fritz had overlooked in his packing—a very big knitting-needle and a very small bit of embroidery; a brown battered little book of German legends, and two big opera librettos. The carpet had been swept, except under the bed; everywhere the dust had simply risen and then settled softly. The light was dim

and soft, for the dark-blue curtain at the window was drawn, as she had left it. Soft light and the faint delicate odor of flowers.

The next morning at sunrise, Fritz lay listening. He heard Jim rise, dress softly and steal out, and half an hour later come back, go into her room and gently close the door. There came queer low sounds of dusting and rubbing and moving, suppressed exclamations. And after that a long silence. At last Jim went into the kitchen and began the regular noisy cooking and gay careless whistling—hard whistling—barely stopping at all. At seven o'clock he came to Fritz, whose eyes were closed. He filled the pitcher and then came to the bed and leaned over. Fritz opened his eyes.

"Well!" cried Jim. "Awake already? Better get up. It's a bully morning!"

Each morning after that Fritz lay listening, each day he found in her room a fresh little cluster. And the next Sunday when he was ready to start out, he walked into her room and came out with the flowers. As he wrapped them up carefully, Jim turned from the piano and saw him and started half up, but sank down and sat there until Fritz had gone.

Through the summer the flowers went every Sun-



day. But nothing ever came back. And neither Fritz nor Jim said anything about it.

One Sunday as Fritz was starting, Jim rose and handed him the old fiddle:

"You might want it."

Fritz took it with him always after that.

In the autumn Jim suddenly began telling Fritz stories. Stories of the other singers he was beginning to meet in the evenings; funny stories of gay careless artist life; wonderful tales from the studios in Paris, Berlin and Dresden; thrilling stories of how famous voices had risen 'way up—swiftly; stories of hard patient devoted lives, of radiant happy lives, of eager intense hopeful lives; stories all centered round the song, and always the "glad song" thrilling with life! He told them in all their details, often he told the best ones over several times, and once when he had told a particularly humorous tale he laughed and said:

"Coming to think of it—I've told you that twice before. You must know it by heart!"

"Yes," said Fritz, still laughing, "I told it myself already—and *she* laughed like a Frenchman!"

But all this was only the deep inner part of Jim's life, the life behind the voice. This life was kept 'way in. It only made him work the harder.

The voice was everything.

He was careful of himself. He followed every direction of anxious old Fritz, he took long walks and boat rides with deep breathing of fresh air, he bought only wholesome food, he never smoked or drank, he forced himself to sleep better at night. He seemed always in training—sometimes over-trained, the nerves strung too tight, the grip on himself too strong.

And the voice. To Fritz, the voice seemed growing so marvellously rich and true that again and again he turned at the piano and stared up with his old eyes shining. But to Jim, the voice—her voice—seemed imprisoned; he could feel how it would sound if it were only free; and he grew fiercely impatient at himself for his human slowness and weakness, the mistakes that marred, the failures to sing the tones he could hear deep within him.

Only at rare intervals he let himself go, just for a few songs in the old dim hour of dusk. And what a strange mingling then—of gladness and despair; of radiant dreams and sweet reverent memories; of agony and loneliness, of deep resolve.

Such hours were rare. Even songs were rare. He spent most of his time and thought on the dry voice exercises, ten times harder than those

Gretchen and he had so gaily conquered; and yet he conquered them now alone, thinking and working often for weeks on the same one; still going over and over it by himself days after his teacher had been quite satisfied, over and over till not a trace of roughness or uncertainty was left.

At his lessons he listened closely to the smallest suggestion from his teacher. He got many more from the other singers he was meeting. Some of them were already famous in concert and opera; and when on Friday evenings, in the teacher's big dim studio, one of these artists sang, Jim would lie back in a corner, his eyes tight closed, his hands clenched inside his coat-pockets, shutting out all other sights and sounds in the world, hearing only the voice, listening intently to every bit of technique or phrasing.

As winter came on he added an hour to his copying, and with the extra dollar he went once a week to his old place in the dark gallery; there he fought back the memories, loneliness, despair—and leaned 'way forward. And at such moments his broad dark gaunt face was transfigured, he seemed hardly to breath or live, but only to listen.

"I myself will be nothing. I will only sing."

## CHAPTER XXV

### A BEAUTIFUL SILVER DOLLAR

**D**AGO JOE stood just inside the black mouth of an alley—waiting. It was a little before midnight, two months after Jim had left him.

Quick footsteps came up the street. Joe leaned eagerly forward, his face came sharply out of the black into the bluish white of the street light, the passer-by took one startled look, and sprang out toward the curb and hurried on.

The look in Joe's face was the climax, the whole result of his life.

\* \* \* \* \*

"I can never sing with you. You'll think this over. You'll see why I can't. You'll never come near me again."

Joe had been thinking it over.

He had walked for hours by day and by night, slouching along through empty streets, with head bent low; elbowing fiercely through the gay home-

rushing crowds; he had lain for days in foul lodging-house bunks; he had stood whole evenings at the bar in Bowery saloons—the same saloons where “The Drunkard’s Dream” had brought such roars of applause; he had sat huddled in basement wine-rooms, watching his countrymen bend over the cards; he had stood down on the East River docks, staring off into the twinkling glittering moonlit water. He had robbed two men who were drunk. He had spent whole nights in the little Italian theatre—crashing his chords on the keys of the yellow piano.

He had lived again through the one glad dream of his life, from the beginning—to the end.

The pictures of his dream—how vivid they were!—flashed across his dull mind in rapid succession.

The dark cold little clubroom where he first tried to play, first heard Jim’s voice, first thrilled with wild joy as Jim unfolded his plan.

•“You play—I sing! We’ll never stop till we die!” How suddenly rich and radiant life became in an instant—and so sure!

Then “The Drunkard’s Dream,” the saloons and the jovial roars of applause—the foul old street dragging the song down into the mud.

Next the sparkling laughing Rip Van Winkle, the ladies' gowns and jewels and eyes, the throb of rag-time—and the song of Jim rising and soaring as though nothing bad could ever pull it down! The pure fresh boy soprano—how it rang still in his ears!

But now he could feel the street creep up, he could feel it in Jim's big eyes—flashing again as they had flashed over the dice, in Jim's white strained face, in his quick nervous laugh, in his voice, in the throb of the rag-time!

He saw the proprietor's smile.

He felt the voice being slowly nursed to life by old Fritz and Gretchen. How jealous and lonely he had been—practicing hours and nights and months at the old piano.

Then again the glorious months in the "Rip," and again the street creeping up. The voice growing thin and hard—straining for encores!

Again the proprietor's face—and his smile.

And last of all, that terrible night with Jim, and Joe's jealous rage that had made him lie. Gretchen hate Jim? No—she loved him! She would always love him! But so would Joe! And now—with a sickening empty feeling he came to the end.

"I can never sing with you again. You'll think it over. You'll see why."

Yes—he saw why. The street—dragging and dragging, had dragged Joe back until Joe was the very Street itself. And Jim had gone up, Jim was the Song.

Again the proprietor's smile. Joe watched it waking and sleeping. Slowly he fastened upon it all the blame. The "Rip" had forced the gambling, the gambling had forced the stealing, the stealing had torn Joe from Jim forever.

Slowly all Joe's wild glad dreams and cold hideous nightmares, hopes and fears and despair and longings—all dropped away. He began drinking harder. For days and nights he heard nothing but the proprietor's jovial reasonable voice. All else—the whole world—grew distorted, far away, unreal.

Except this reasonable laugh, this face, this smile.

\* \* \* \* \*

Dago Joe stood just inside the black mouth of an alley—waiting. Down at City Hall the clock struck one. He stepped out into the quivering light.

The same Joe. The same burly figure in rags, the same enormous shoulders, with the soft red

handkerchief tied loosely round the neck, and the face too was the same. A face marked by the street for its own. The fight, the bluff, the sneer, the gamble—all were there. The face was white under the dirt, the thick lips were curled up slightly, the nostrils quivered. The big dull greenish eyes twinkled and gleamed—watching.

From down the street came occasional faint bursts of music, gay laughter and applause, as the doors of the “Rip” were opened to let out hilarious parties. “Sporting cabs,” carriages and automobiles were waiting; one by one they came up the street. Soon all were gone.

Joe had stepped back. A dull mass of black in the shadow, only now and then moving slowly forward as footsteps approached. When even these latest passers stopped coming, the figure shuffled impatiently.

The lights in the “Rip” went out. The big doors slammed.

Joe stepped out again. In his hand something glittered; for a moment his face broke into a smile, which settled into a sneer; he stooped quickly and placed the something on the sidewalk—just past the alley. Then he stepped back into the dark.

The something was a big bright silver dollar.



From the "Rip" quick footsteps were approaching. Firm heavy footsteps echoing cheerfully in the cold empty silence.

Nearer. The man was humming a gay little rag-time air in time to his steps.

Nearer! The man wore a rich fur coat, rich gloves and hat; his beard was nicely trimmed, his shoes were well polished; he was rich and strong and prosperous.

Nearer! The man was contentedly smiling.

A cry of surprise. He had passed the mouth of the alley, he had seen the silver dollar, and with a laugh he stooped to pick it up.

From the black mouth of the alley the figure stole slowly, then swiftly! The ragged arm swept far up and plunged!

The laugh was cut short in a low sharp cry, which gurgled into silence; the man sank down on his knees, fell on his side, and then slowly turned on his back. His eyes stared up in the last glimmer of consciousness—which was agony. And close above, two dull burning eyes looked down—hungrily—till the glimmer in the eyes below went out and left only a fixed startled stare.





"Playing the music of his life, the result of his life, the climax at the end."



That night the little Italian theatre was filled with strange wild music.

It was nearly morning; already through the grimy skylight above a faint gray light came down into the yellow circle from the one gas-jet over the piano.

Dim and ghostly up on the rear of the stage stood the knights and ladies and kings and queens of the Romance of Roland.

And staring up at them sat Dago Joe, his shaggy head thrown back, his eyes vacant; for all his soul was in his hands on the keys, playing the music of his life, the result of his life, the climax at the end.

The rich sparkling roaring racing street, with its eternal fights and lies and bluffs and chances—all throbbed in the chords!

But through it all rose a deep wild yearning. For the music was empty, only an accompaniment to a song that was gone forever.

The yearning grew fainter. The note of the street rose warm, rich and gay. The music grew faster! On the thick lips came again the sneer! The big hands jerked up and down in the exciting irregular glorious throb of rag-time; louder, deeper, faster—till all the gaiety was gone and left only a frenzy of throbbing! Where was the song now?

The street was all here! Faster, louder! Furious crashing!—Silence.

Clutching the knife still red, the arm swept up again—and plunged!

The shaggy head sank slowly down and struck the keys. A low muffled discord—as of something dropping down—down—down—and away.

The beginning of eternal silence.

Dago Joe was dead.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### "THE MAN WANTED THE LADY"

A YEAR had burned slowly away. And now Jim began singing for people.

He sang first in the studios of his new artist friends, then in the houses of rich music patrons, and later in small public recitals.

Those who listened watched him—some very curiously, some spellbound. They watched the more closely because they saw that he never noticed their gaze. And what they felt under the voice they saw in the rigid poise of his figure, in his hands clinched behind him, in his broad tense face and deep-set twinkling flashing eyes. Desperate gladness!

Many who heard were eager to know the singer. But when they met him they found him quiet, reserved and shrinking. The few who at last grew to know him, found him gentle and very humble, lonely—struggling to be glad. Feeling this they

helped him rise the swifter, they gave him friendship, and they could see him struggle to give his friendship in return, but he always failed and sank back into himself.

"It's not me," he often said, "I am nothing. It's only the voice. And—well—that was given to me—it isn't mine."

Some people said that he sang as though a ghost were listening.

Often after singing he would go quickly from the buzz of admiration and wonder, go home and sit alone in her bedroom in the soft light of the candle until long after midnight. The flowers were always fresh on her bureau.

As money began to pour in, one Saturday morning he brought home a huge cluster of rich "American Beauties"; he put them on the little bureau, but then took them away and brought back a humble bunch of little white carnations.

He used to wander whole afternoons down along the docks.

He still kept telling his stories, till Fritz learned them by heart; the stories that made some one "laugh like a Frenchman." Most of them were incidents to show the wonderful success his voice was having.

As Sunday drew near, Jim would ask Fritz to play for him; he would sing and his voice would thrill with that same desperate gladness. And at such times the old man would forget himself, and with tears rolling down his cheeks he would cry, just as though he were answering some question from Jim:

“Yes! Jimmy! I will tell to her all you say in your song! All—all—all!”

The five rich busy months of the musical season went by.

And now this strange dramatic voice was known to thousands of people. It was praised in scores of newspaper reviews. Even the most exacting critics pointed out only faults which they admitted were one by one being cleared away. Many predicted a glorious future. Some shook their heads—watching Jim.

He shrank from applause as though in taking it he were stealing from some one. He was relieved when the season was over.

\* \* \* \* \*

One balmy May afternoon he had been wandering up along the East River docks, watching the old ships and the sailors from all over the world, trying to feel the music in it all as he used to. At



last he gave up to the empty feeling and sat down on a bench by a ferry dock.

Behind him Twenty-sixth Street stretched back into the city.

Jim sat listlessly gazing into the sunny sparkling waves of the river.

Clang-clang-clang! Every few minutes came the clang of a gong behind him.

At last he turned around; facing the city.

Clang-clang-clang! An ambulance came rapidly down the street and turned into Bellevue Hospital—a huge cheerless pile of gray buildings to his right. The big gates swung to.

Jim was still staring.

Clang-clang-clang! A police wagon dashed down to the ferry. Two men, an old woman, and a girl of sixteen—starting for the Island—for the poor-house, work-house and prison. He watched their faces closely, and when they had gone he sat with eyes fixed on the boat, thinking.

Clang-clang-clang! An S. P. C. C. 'bus-load of boys—embryo thieves, drunkards, gamblers—given up by their parents. A jolly lot of youngsters!

Jim sat for an hour in silence.

Clang-clang-clang! Down the street rolled

slowly a black closed wagon, which stopped at the Morgue close behind him. A young woman—miserably but neatly dressed—jumped out with the official and followed the coffin. She kept one hand on it as she went in. The doors slammed behind her.

Jim rose and walked up the street.

As he passed Bellevue he saw, close by the gate, a long low building, which had over its doors the words "For the Criminally Insane."

He walked faster. Clang-clang-clang! Another wagon was coming.

Thousands every week. The street dropping the wrecks of its racing.

\* \* \* \* \*

The next day Jim went to one of his friends—a young hospital interne.

"Do you ever have singing in your place?"

"Yes. In the chapel on Sundays. Some call it singing."

"I should like to try."

During the summer he sang in hospitals, in asylums, and on all the three Islands. Again people listened, spellbound, to his voice—to the desperate gladness. But *these* people seemed to understand it well; they felt no strange note; and they eagerly

joined with him in the struggle to be glad. He set hundreds of them thinking—some bitterly, some tenderly, some hopefully—all rousing to life!

As he sang he watched their faces.

“What a wonder of a nurse she would have been,” he was thinking.

Late one August evening he went to Joe’s haunt—the Italian theatre.

Up on the little low stage the white-haired Italian was carefully putting away his gay knights and ladies—hanging them up still fierce and proud on hooks round the walls.

Standing in the rear of the darkened place Jim sang one of the glad old songs from Naples. He sang just as Joe had taught him. And when he finished he saw the old man leaning far over the footlights—staring with bewildered shining eyes. But as Jim came down the aisle, the smooth old face suddenly broke into a gay kindly smile. He shook Jim’s hand and told, in much musical Italian, how glad he was to hear how the voice had grown.

“Now it is—how you say—from de stars!” he cried. “Ah—you must be happy—so happy!—But no—you are sad.

Jim smiled and took the old man’s arm.

“I want to sing for some of your people,” he

said. "I need no pay. If you will find me places where people are homesick for Naples—or just sick or tired or unhappy or poor—or trying to be glad—at weddings perhaps—I would like to sing there. I want to try to give them something like what *you* give them," he said smiling.

The old man's face grew ten times brighter, but still amazed and bewildered. It suddenly cleared and his eyes glistened:

"Is it—because of Joe?" he asked.

Jim turned away.

"Because of Joe and—a friend of his."

They both stared at the battered piano.

"Yes. You shall sing," said the old man simply. "In this country *de* street is so loud. Too much *de* street—not enough *de* song."

So Jim sang all that summer. And he felt no shrinking but only relief. He seemed always grateful.

He gave away all his money, and autumn found him penniless.

\* \* \* \* \*

Then came more studio gatherings, recitals, larger concerts. Little by little he was ordered to drop his "slum singing," for the teacher noticed the strained look come back, and thought it was caused

by overwork. But that wasn't it. The long spell of relief had passed, and the growing applause was bringing again the old strain. The voice must go up—'way up—and it must be glad!

More than ever he tried to live this life, more and more he shrank from it. He redoubled his work. More desperately glad grew the songs.

Suddenly his vigorous body began losing strength.

Again and again the teacher warned him to go easier, to save himself for the work later on. He even spoke of the opera. But Jim only laughed and said:

"It will last. If you felt as I feel you would not be afraid."

The teacher scolded in vain, and at last stopped half the lessons. But the idleness only made Jim worse.

There was one night when he walked until daylight, and as he stood by the river the old fierce street feeling came up with a rush; for a moment he stared into the black water, tempted to try the climax of gambling.

But he fought it down and walked on.

One day the teacher met him with a delighted smile.

"What do you think I have done for you?"

He paused a moment—watching Jim's face, and added slowly:

"You will sing—next month—at the concert—Sunday night—in the Metropolitan!"

Jim started slightly. He stared hard at the teacher. Suddenly his face grew tense, his big black eyes sparkled and he seized the man's hand.

"Glorious!" he cried. "Glorious! Why it's the chance of a lifetime! It's what I always dreamed of! Always dreamed of—always—dreamed of."

His voice sank, his face relaxed and the old hunger rose in his eyes.

"Always—dreamed of. Well—I can't ever thank you. All I can do is to get ready—and sing and—make you proud of me. I'll do that—sure."

But the teacher's face had darkened with disappointment.

"Jimmy—I'm—sorry for you. I thought this would rouse you up—I hoped——"

"It will!" Again the strained eagerness. "It will be the gladdest time of my life! Wait and see!"

So he said all through the next two weeks. In spite of all warnings he either worked or planned or worried about the voice, day and night.

The rehearsal came. At last he stood in the wonderful place of soft light. He sang the "big glad song" from Faust—which he and Joe had heard in this very place so long before. Again the song poured into the darkness—passionate, thrilling now with the fresh joy of love and now with the hunger and the anguish of despair.

"The man wanted the lady!"

That night he sat in her room until dawn.

Then he went out for the flowers. An hour later he came back and climbed slowly up the stairs. Half way up he turned giddy and then fell unconscious. He came to in a few minutes and climbed up by holding to the banister.

He said nothing to Fritz. He ate nothing that day and lay awake all that night. The next morning he could not get up.

"It is nothing," he said; "I will be all right tomorrow. And we have still three days."

When the teacher came to see him, Jim wanted to sing from the big chair before the fire, but the teacher angrily refused. He sent for a famous up-town physician, and then he took old Fritz out for a walk and they had a long earnest talk together.

While they were gone the physician came, ex-

amined Jim thoroughly and gave him a strong heart stimulant.

"Nothing wrong at all!" he cried cheerfully. "It's not the body—that's sound as a bell—only a little starved and over-strained. It's you—you're worrying too much about that concert," he smiled down kindly. "I know how it feels—it's hard on the nerves—But try to forget it—be quiet—eat—sleep—try to be happy! Why my boy, just think of the life—the fame—the career you have ahead!"

"Yes," Jim whispered. He shut his eyes tight.

The doctor had gone away.

Slowly the stimulant began to work. Jim could feel the strength rising—dull animal strength.

He rose slowly out of bed and walked into her room and sat there in the darkness.

The life ahead? No. The life forever behind. Dreams—dreams—dreams! On the edge of delirium!

\* \* \* \* \*

"Jimmy!" It was Fritz's voice—low and eager.



## CHAPTER XXVII

"THE SONG MUST BE LIKE WE DREAMED"

“**V**EN you sing—she vill be dere—to listen!—Vait! Don’t look so strange!—I vill tell.”

The old voice grew slow, still shaking with excitement.

“Two years ago—ven I found her dot night—she vas in de big house of Fraulein Louisa—in a room—alone. Her face—it looked—so much alone! But quick I see she feel not for herself! Her shame, her black life ahead—all ees not’ings. She feel only for you. She vas so quiet. Ven I took her tight in mein arms she shoost told me so low:

“‘No police—no trial—no reporters—no big loud shame to come in his life. I vill do vat dey vish. I vill go quick to prison. Yes—quick! I must go from all his life—far away. I must neffer see him again.’

"So quiet—Gott in Himmel—she spoke so quiet. But I say:

" 'No! You can neffer drop away, he vill love you all his life! You must live! If you go to prison you vill die!'

"I go und I find Fraulein Louisa. She vas so happy—shoost married; I tell her how mein Gretchen love too, und how she steal because she love—I tell so hard—Fraulein Louisa she cry—she fix it quick mit her friends, so ve haf no police und no prison. Only Gretchen must go for two years to de place to help bad girls who steal—Bad girls! How bad vas Gretchen?—But so it vas better dan prison. I come back to her, I tell, und she vas glad. She give me a letter. I read it. Again I hold her so tight und I say:

" 'No! Ven he reads he vill neffer sing again!' —But den she only smiles.

" 'Yes,' she say, 'he vill sing. I know how strong he ees. I teil him here how I love de voice. He vill sing, und soon vill come a life of big beauties—new songs—new friends—und so—it vill be better. I must stay away. All de peoples vere I stole—dey vill tell. Und I would be—a shame—for him—a big black shame!'—Den she vas quiet—shaking in mein arms—und den she say, 'Dere

must be not one spot. De song must be—like we dreamed—shoost like we dreamed!’ ”

Old Fritz stopped for breath.

In the soft light that streamed through from the lamp in the other room, Jim’s big eyes were shining, twinkling, staring in an agony of suspense right into Fritz’s face. He leaned ’way forward, and his hand gripped Fritz’s shoulder tighter—slowly tighter. Fritz went on:

“In de two years ven I come, I tell her how peoples rich und glad, peoples poor und sick und tierd und old, peoples good und bad, peoples down in de heart mit sorrow, peoples young in de heart mit joy. All love de song. De song on mein fiddle I play!—She play de piano mit me—but she dreams she play mit you. Und ven I go away—she play by herself—mit your song singing so soft und fine—inside of her ears.

“I see her—how she loves. I see you—how you love. I tell her:

“‘No! It must not be! You must togedder sing und play und love for all your life ahead.’—But she say only:

“‘Vait.’

“I see you begin to lose your life. I tell her all. I tell how you fix her room, how you stay in de

room all night mit your dreams, I bring to her de flowers, I beg so hard:

“ ‘Give me vords to him—how you love—how you dream—how you play.’—But she say, so quiet:

“ ‘Vait. De new life vill come. Alreatty you bring fine stories—how happy he ees.’

“ ‘Lies!’ I say. ‘All lies! He shoost tells fine stories so I tell you—so you think de voice you love ees glad. Lies! De voice only fights to be glad—fights und loses. Mitout love de voice vill die.’—But she say only:

“ ‘Vait.’

“At last I tell how soon you vill sing in de big concert. How glad she vas—how proud!

“Time goes. I come effery veek. It ees not enough—she must hear more quick—so I write to her effery day. I tell how you try so hard—how de voice goes up und up und all peoples say—‘He vill do it. Yes—so fine.’

“Time goes. I tell how you yourself alreatty go down—down—down! How you are here in her room. How mitout love de voice vill die! But she cry only:

“ ‘Vait! Vait!’

“Time goes! I come und take her in mein arms und say:

“ ‘Now you must come or de voice vill neffer sing again!’

“A long time she lie in mein arms und shake und shake. Und at last she whisper so slow—so deep—so glad:

“ ‘Tell him—ven he sings—I vill be dere—to listen. I vill be dere—to live again. I vill be dere—to love for all his life ahead!’ ”

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### THE SONG

**I**N the great rich home of the Song, in the deep expectant silence—Gretchen sat with old Fritz—breathless, waiting.

From her dreams alone in a place shut off from the world, she had come so suddenly back at night into the roar and the glare of the street; she had seen again the eager faces, the sparkling lights, the swift jerking racing lights; she had heard the clangs and clatters, gay laughter and curses; she had felt again the throbbing race and gamble and fight—the relentless sparkling street—the street that had crushed her!

And she had shrunk closer to Fritz—who had smiled.

They sat, as she had wished, in the same old seats 'way up in the gallery—dark, mysterious, thrilling like the dreams she had dreamed with Jim of the “World of Big Beauties” ahead.

Old memories.

A boy with black flashing eyes, a voice fresh,

pure and glad, but wild and throbbing. Her first thrill of fascination and fear as first she had felt the street's fire burn into the voice of Lucky Jim the Gambler! Then the night she had nursed him, the days and weeks and months when she felt the voice slowly healed by the power of love; she felt that love rise and swell and fill all the world! And again rose the voice—the voice of a man, deep and rich and vibrating with all the new joy of love and of hope and of dreams soaring high! And then once again the street creeping slowly up and up—and burning. Black memories now! The street close around her—almighty, insatiable, cruel! Again the shrinking.

She drew a quick quivering breath and leaned back.

From far below, out of the hushed, measured orchestra chords—rose the Song.

Low and solemn at first—but even so she could feel what was coming, she could feel the tremendous power beneath.

New power. Where now was the desperate gladness? Where now the struggle? Won. Gone was the sorrow, the lonely despair and the yearning. Now only the glorious triumph of joy! But joy solemn and deep, embracing all mankind.

Five thousand faces stared. The strain of the Street was forgotten. The Song of joy and peace and eternal love had claimed its own. It held five thousand breathless—for a moment.

But Gretchen saw nothing. For she knew that the Song was only to her. So low, so solemn, so close to her soul—it was saying:

“Come—for the life we dreamed of is here. Come—forever closer, closer to me; hear what I hear, see what I see, feel what I feel. Open your eyes and your ears and your soul to the World of Big Beauties with me. Be glad—for the Street is forever behind us; the fight, the race, the lie, the gamble—are only parts of death. Deep under the glare and the roar of the street—life—real life—is silently waiting for the time when men shall no longer be blind and deaf. Be glad—for the Age of the Street will forever pass to make way for the Age of the Song. Be glad—for life—real life—is not murder of the weak by the mighty. Be glad—for life is creation—the race where each helps his brother, that Big Beauty may come first ahead! Be glad—for life is the birth and the growth of beauty and joy for all! Be glad—for life is love!”

THE END





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